

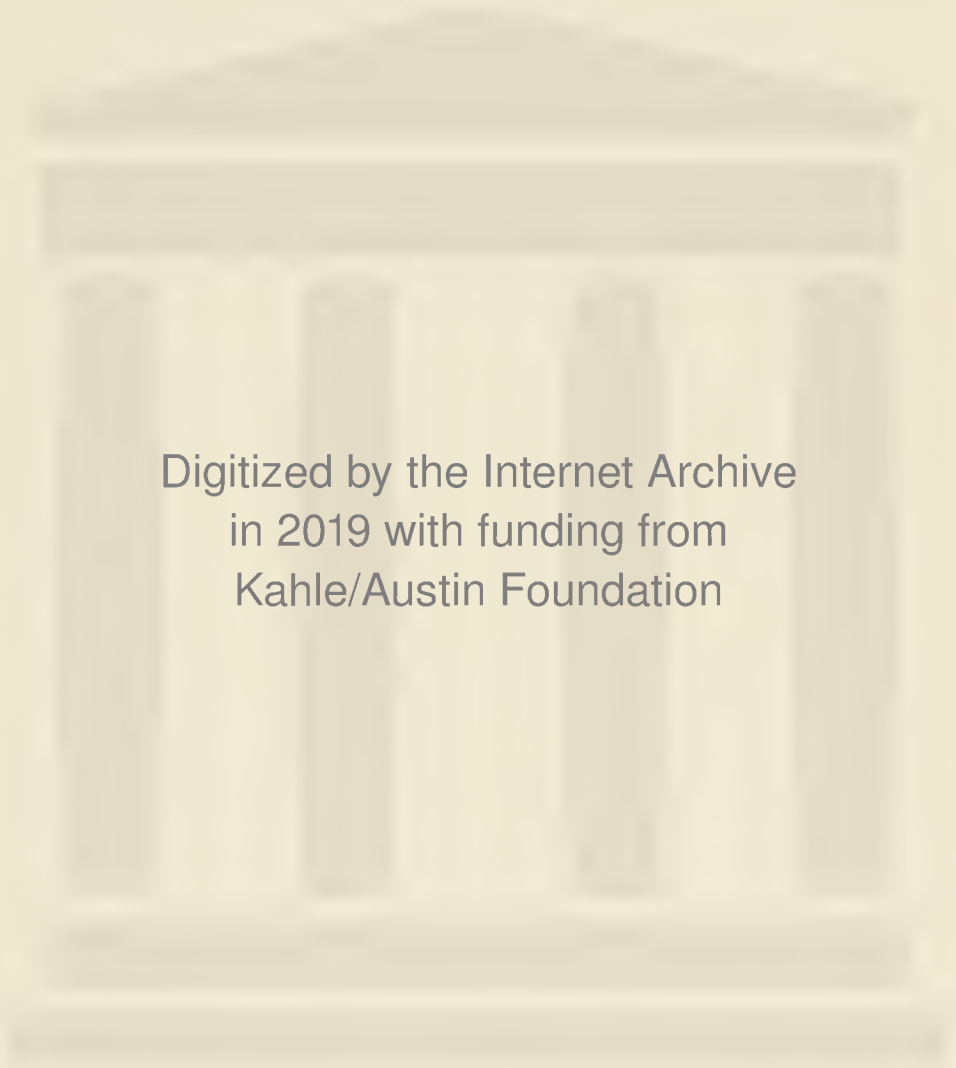




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THE MIRACLE PLAYS OF MATHURĀ



The Miracle Plays of Mathurā

by Norvin Hein

New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1972



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To the people of Braj  
and to Frederick Salmon Growse, I.C.S. (1837–1893),  
translator of the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās,  
author of *Mathurā : A District Memoir*,  
lover of the Braj country.

Without their help  
this book would not have been written.





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## Preface

The residents of the North Indian region known as Braj must be mentioned first in the list of those whose aid has facilitated this publication. Most of the material in the pages that follow is actually a gift from these gentle-mannered people and especially from the actors and patrons of drama among them, who allowed the author to sit, listen, and ask innumerable questions at their gatherings. A special debt is owed to Professor Gopāl Datt Śarma, now a director of the Films Division, Government of India, Bombay, and to Śrī Mukuṭ Vallabhjī Gosvāmī of Ahmedabad, both of whom read all the author's early manuscripts and checked his texts and translations. Professor Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī of Saugar University, when curator of the Museum of Archaeology in Mathurā, made his personal counsel and the resources of his institution available without limit. Others who gave constant help were Śrī Kanhaiyā Lāl Gupta, Govind Dās Gupta, Kuñj Bihārī Lāl Bhaṭnāgar, Dāmodar Dās Śarma, Motī Lāl Śarma, the Reverend A. C. Chakravartī, and Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl, who was at the time secretary of the Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal. The Methodist mission hospital in Vṛindāban and the Clancy Higher Secondary School in Mathurā are thanked for their patient hospitality to the author and his enterprises. The author is grateful to the many librarians who toiled knowingly and unknowingly in this project—in the John G. White Collection of Orientalia and Folklore at the Cleveland Public Library, in the British Museum and the India Office Library in London, in the Vidyāsāgar Pustakālay in Mathurā, and in the library of the Temple of Śrī Raṅganātha in Vṛindāban. Many other debts will be acknowledged at the appropriate points in the pages below.

This book in an early form was a dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Yale University. The field study on which it is based was supported by a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. Its completion has been made possible by generous help from Yale University,



from the American Association of Theological Schools, and, finally, by a Fulbright research grant.

The first part of Chapter Four has been published previously as a chapter entitled 'The Rām Līlā' in *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, ed. Milton Singer (Philadelphia, The American Folklore Society, 1959). The American Folklore Society has given kind permission to reprint it. The author's short paper, 'Kṛṣṇaite Mystery Plays in Ancient Mathurā', reprinted in Chapter Nine, is taken from the *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress for the History of Religions* (Tokyo, Maruzen, 1960), with the kind permission of the International Association for the History of Religions. Certain information will be repeated which appeared in 'The Ram Lila', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (October 22, 1950), and in 'Rāslīlā ke Videśī Darśak', *Poddār Abhinandan Granth* (Mathurā, Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal, 1952).

Hindī words written down from oral sources by the author himself follow the spellings found in the *Hindī-śabd-sāgar*, ed. Śyāmsundardās (5 vols. Banāras, Kāśī-nāgarī-pracārīṇī Sabhā, 1916-28). The text of the *Uddhav Līlā* in Chapter Eight is given as transcribed from sound recordings by the office of the Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal. Quotations from printed devanāgarī sources have been transliterated.

The romanization of the devanāgarī alphabet has been standardized to such an extent that the transliterations used require explanation at only a few points. To make the book more readable for those who are not indologists, the lingual sibilant and the lingual vowel will be given the older renderings *sh* and *ri*. The special lingual *r* of Hindī will have to be represented by *r*. Even when followed by *-i*, it will usually be distinguishable by its intervocalic position from the vowel *ri*. The most troublesome of the nasal characters will be represented thus: the ardhacandra by *ñ*; anusvāra by *ṇ* or *ṇi*; the guttural nasal by *ṅ*, the palatal by *ṇ̄*, and the lingual by *ṇ*. In the romanization of certain words the reader will often find apparent inconsistencies which are due to their occurrence in both Hindī and Sanskrit contexts. Thus 'Rām' will be found as the name of the deity when Hindī speech or North Indian events are being reported, but the spelling may be 'Rāma' when the geographical reference has no such limitation or when material from Sanskrit literature is being discussed.

A glossary of Indic words is provided at the end of the book.

This book will see publication twenty years or more after the field study on which it is based. It describes theatrical institutions as they were just after India's attaining of independence. The condition of some may by now have undergone much change. There is recorded here a traditional order that may not now be otherwise recoverable.

The publication process has been difficult and time-consuming. Since 1964, when this manuscript was completed, it has not been possible to utilize new publications significantly.

The decorative designs of the book, save two, are stencil patterns used by the wood-carvers of Mathurā who supply blocks to the cloth printers of the town. The design that appears on page 163 has been published previously in Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting*, 1 (London, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916). That publication is the source also of the seventeenth-century Jammu drawing reproduced on page 105. For the design on page 70 I am indebted to K. C. Aryan, *Rekhā* (Delhi, Rekhā Prakashan, 1952).

NORVIN HEIN

*Yale University*  
*November 1970*







## INTRODUCTION: MATHURĀ, CENTER OF DRAMA

The traditional social structure of the communities of the North Indian countryside is among the oldest patterns of civilized living now extant. This society's power of survival has not been adequately explained. Continuity in other stable advanced cultures has usually rested upon well-developed institutions for formal education. The tenacity of Hindu culture rests upon another base, for formal schooling has not been an important part of the upbringing of a majority of the Hindu population in any period of history. Yet the Hindu's long resistance to external pressures demonstrates an adequate understanding of the intricate ideas that explain and guide his ancestral way of life. It is necessary to surmise the existence of old nonliterary forms of Hindu education, through which the children of each generation have been trained in the lore that is fundamental to their culture.

This inquiry began as a literary search for traces of obscure religious drama, on the supposition that North India's instruments of oral education may have included traditions of popular theater which had never been recorded. This conjecture was encouraged by scattered writings which show that many other regions of India possessed living dramas reported neither in books on the Sanskrit drama nor in surveys of dramatic literature in the vernaculars. It was possible to learn that Bengal has a provincial miracle play called the *yātrā*, first described for the outside world in 1882 in Nīśikānta Chattopādhyāya's booklet *The Yātrās: Or The Popular Dramas of Bengal*. Since then, important additional information on the *yātrā* has been provided by Bengal's great literary scholars, Dinesh Chandra Sen and Sushil Kumar De.<sup>1</sup> In the East

<sup>1</sup> Nīśikānta Chattopādhyāya, *The Yātrās: Or The Popular Dramas of Bengal* (London, Trübner & Co., 1882). Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1911), pp. 724-43; and Dinesh Chandra Sen, ed., *Vāṅga Sahitya Parichaya* (2 vols, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1914), I, 45-66, 2, 1592-1620.

Panjab and its borderlands there exists a type of operatic verse drama called the *svāṅg*. The literary characteristics of the *svāṅg* can be studied through the work of Sir Richard Carnac Temple, who published the complete texts of a number of them.<sup>2</sup> The most famous of the regional dramas are those of Malabar, whose *kathakalī* and other plays have been well described in numerous studies during the last four decades.<sup>3</sup> Madras and Andhra have old-style popular religious plays of their own, some description of which is available.<sup>4</sup> Maharashtra apparently has a folk drama called the *laṭita*, and in Gujarat there survives a rude drama called the *bhavai*.<sup>5</sup>

With reference to Uttar Pradesh, the geographical and cultural hub of the North, similar forms of religious theater have been mentioned from time to time, but the literature is vague regarding their classes and extent. Notices of the existence of several kinds of drama—and little more—are found in Sir William Ridgeway's *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*.<sup>6</sup> In the mountain region of Kumaon, which is not typical of the province as a whole, I. Minaev once recorded some rude impersonations which used to go on at the *Holī* festival in Almorā.<sup>7</sup> The only available monograph on a vernacular drama of the province is Friedrich Rosen's edition of the *Indarsabhā* of Amānat, published in 1892 with a German translation and an extensive introduction.<sup>8</sup> The introduction provides a useful analysis of the types of drama Rosen found current in Hindustan about 1890:

Sushil Kumar De, *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1919), pp. 442–54.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Panjāb* (3 vols. Bombay, Education Society's Press, 1884–1901), I, viii, and Nos. 6, 10, 18, and 30. Cf. John Robson, *A Selection of Khyāls or Mārwarī Plays, with an Introduction and a Glossary* (Beawar, Beawar Mission Press, 1866).

<sup>3</sup> Among the significant writings are: R. V. Poduval, 'The Malabar Drama,' *Madras Christian College Magazine*, 8 (Apr. 1928), 101–07; K. R. Pisharoti, 'Kerala Theatre,' *Annamalai University Journal*, I (1932), 91–113; Emily Gilchrist Hatch, 'The Kathakali: The Indigenous Drama of Malabar' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1934); C. A. Menon, 'The Histrionic Art of Malabar,' *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 9 (1941), 121–32; K. Bharatha Iyer, *Kathakali: The Sacred Dance-drama of Malabar* (London, Luzac & Co., 1955).

<sup>4</sup> V. Raghavan, 'The Bhāgavata Mēlā Nāṭaka,' *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 5 (1937), 167–71; see also his many articles and reviews in *Trivenī* in the decade 1930–40. P. Venkatachala Pathy, *Le Théâtre télougou contemporain* (Paris, A. Maisonneuve, 1933), pp. 47–59.

<sup>5</sup> R. K. Yajnik, *The Indian Theatre* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1933), pp. 62 ff., Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, *Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature* (Bombay, K. M. Tripathi & Co., 1924), pp. 181 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Sir William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1915), pp. 172–206.

<sup>7</sup> I. Minaev, 'Narodnyia dramaticheskiiya predstavleniya v prazdnik Kholi v Almore,' *Imperatorskaya Russkago Arkheologicheskago Obschestva, Vostochnago Otdeleniya, Zapiski*, 5 (1891), 290–300.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Rosen, *Die Indarsabha des Amanat, neuindisches Singspiel in lithographischen Original text, mit Übersetzung und Erklärungen sowie einer Einleitung über das hindustanische Drama* (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1892).

1. Hieratic dramas, which honor certain deities and are often performed in the celebration of their festivals
2. Mythological dramas, deliberate literary creations usually based on themes from the national epics
3. Dramas of relatively secular nature dealing with the lives of legendary figures
4. Historical dramas
5. The modern professional stage of the large cities.

The fact that a hieratic class of drama heads this list gave assurance that an important category of religious drama exists and suggested that a concentration of all efforts upon it would be practical.

The *Indarsabhā* itself is not a specimen of such miracle plays. In both town and country in the days before the cinema the *Indarsabhā* was extremely popular,<sup>9</sup> but it is not a religious play in any significant sense, nor is it modeled on any Hindu religious plays described in this book or in other sources.<sup>10</sup> The *Indarsabhā* was the creation of a circle of Muslim literati of Lucknow. Its prototypes—if it had any—have not been brought to light.

Rosen, and Minaev also, dealt with dramas which are only peripheral to Hindu life in Uttar Pradesh. The vernacular traditions of religious drama which may survive among the Hindus of North India are known in detail only to those who in some way participate in them. To meet the performers of such plays and to describe the dramas in their fullness was the initial purpose of this study.

Where could the religious drama be studied to best advantage? The materials that Sir William Ridgeway compiled suggested that Mathurā District might be the home of many actors. Other works, including Frederick Salmon Growse's famous gazetteer of the district,<sup>11</sup> confirmed that Mathurā had been

Since this manuscript was given to its publishers, two valuable wide-ranging new books, J. C. Mathur's *Drama in Rural India* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1964) and Balwant Gargi's charmingly illustrated *Folk Theater of India* (Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1966), have thrown light on all these forms and added the names of others. Gargi includes chapters on *naṭṭāṅkī*, *rāmlīlā* and *rāslīlā*, which prevail in Uttar Pradesh.

<sup>9</sup> Kunwar Sain, 'The Rise and Development of Urdoo Drama,' *Hindustan Review*, 45 (Feb. 1922), p. 169; John Campbell Oman, *Indian Life* (Philadelphia, Gebbie and Co., 1889), pp. 182–94.

<sup>10</sup> Rosen (p. 6) believed that the *Indarsabhā* had been modeled on Hindu religious festival plays—was 'a Vishnuite *yātrā* in Islamic form'—and cites in evidence the *Holī*, *vasant*, and *sāvan* songs in Braj dialect which are incorporated in it. Some of these songs do belong to types sometimes sung in the preliminaries of the *rāslīlā*, but there is a radical difference in the overall forms of these two dramas. The *rāsdhārīs* of Vṛindāban deny emphatically any relationship with the *Indarsabhā*. One prominent *rāsdhārī* said that it had been patterned on the *naṭṭāṅkī*, 'a low-class secular opera'.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Salmon Growse, *Mathurā: A District Memoir* (1st ed. Allahabad, North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1874; 2nd enlarged ed., 1880; 3rd ed., revised and abridged, 1883).



a center of stage activity during the nineteenth century and raised a positive hope that that might still be the case in the middle of the twentieth. So it was to Mathurā and its environs that the author went in search of living miracle plays, alternating his residence between the two urban centers of the district, Mathurā and Vṛindāban. These cities lie only six miles apart in the southwestern corner of Uttar Pradesh, between Delhi and Agra. Mathurā, with a population of 105,773 in the 1951 census, is an ancient Hindu pilgrimage-place (*tīrtha*) and the seat of governmental administration in the district. Vṛindāban has only 22,119 inhabitants but is Mathurā's equal in religious importance. These two towns are revered by Vaishṇavas all over India as scenes of the childhood exploits of Kṛishṇa. To the people of the surrounding country, the towns have additional importance as hubs of their cultural and linguistic region, which is known as Braj. Braj is not a modern governmental unit, even though its boundaries coincide roughly with the limits of the modern Mathurā District. From the time of the first literary references, when this country around Mathurā was known as Śūrasena, it has had a separate identity and a dialect of its own which has enjoyed a high position in literature.

Vṛindāban is known in ancient literature as a sacred locality, but as a city it is comparatively new. It owes its origin to the followers of Caitanya, who created a settlement there in the early part of the sixteenth century. Mathurā is not mentioned in the Vedas, but it was already regarded as an old city in the literature of the classical period. Several early Buddhist *sūttas* mention Madhurā (Mathurā) in connection with the period of the Buddha.<sup>12</sup> The Vishṇu Purāṇa ascribes the founding of the Aryan city of Mathurā to Śatrughna, the brother of Rāma.<sup>13</sup> The beginnings of the Vaishṇava faith in that place are lost in legend. Our earliest assurance of the existence of the Kṛishṇa cult at Mathurā is still the testimony of the Greek geographers, who derived their information from documents of the late fourth and early third centuries B.C. They described Mathurā as a place of great regional importance and suggested that it was then, as now, a center of Kṛishṇa worship: 'This Herakles is held in especial honour by the Sourasenoi, an Indian tribe who possess two large cities, Methora and Cleisobora, and through whose country flows a navigable river called the Iobares.'<sup>14</sup> Some see this Cleisobora as a now-forgotten Kṛishṇapura, and a great preponderance of scholarly opinion holds that this

<sup>12</sup> *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*, trans. F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* (London, Pali Text Society, 1932), p. 62. *Majjhima-Nikāya*, trans. Lord Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha* (London, Oxford University Press, 1927), no. 84, 'Madhurā-sutta', pp. 43-46.

<sup>13</sup> Jīvānanda Vidyāsāgara, ed., *Vishṇupurāṇam* (Calcutta, Sarasvati Press, 1882), p. 504.

<sup>14</sup> J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Bombay, Thacker & Co., 1877), p. 201.

Indian Herakles must refer to Kṛishṇa.<sup>15</sup> Firm archaeological evidence proves that there was an established Kṛishṇa cult in Mathurā at least a century or two before the time of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

We know that the actor's art, too, is ancient in Mathurā. An inscribed stone slab of the first or second century A.D. found there bears a dedication by 'the sons of the actors of Mathurā.'<sup>17</sup> The inscription will be examined in Chapter Nine to show that it was in Kṛishṇaite roles that these actors were accustomed to play. The existence of an active stage tradition in ancient Mathurā is suggested further by the predominance of the Śaurasenī Prakrit language of this region among the vernaculars used in the classical Indian play. Christian Lassen, Albrecht Weber, and Moriz Winternitz inferred from this that Mathurā must have been a creative center of dramatic art in the formative period of the classical theater.<sup>18</sup>

The speech of Mathurā District at the present time is a western Hindi dialect known as Brajbhāshā. This dialect has received full-scale grammatical study in works by Dhīrendra Varma and Kiśorīdās Vājpeyī.<sup>19</sup> It was

<sup>15</sup> See McCrindle, pp. 111 f.; Growse, *Mathurā* (1st ed.), p. 151; A. Cunningham, 'Report of a Tour in Eastern Rajputana in 1882-83', *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, 20 (1885), 31-45; J. Ph. Vogel, 'The Mathura School of Sculpture', *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report* (1906-7), p. 140; J. Kennedy, 'The Child Kṛishṇa, Christianity and the Gujars', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1907), pp. 965 ff., identifies this Indian Herakles with Śiva, but see the argument thoroughly refuted by Ramaprasad Chanda, 'Archaeology and Vaishnava Tradition', *Archaeological Survey of India, Memoirs*, no. 5 (Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Printing, 1920); M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur* (3 vols. Leipzig, C. F. Amelangs Verlag, 1908-22), 1 (1908), 380 f.; Arthur A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1914), p. 411; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (5 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1922-55), 2 (1932), 543; Walter Ruben, *Krishna, Konkordanz und Kommentar der Motive seines Heldenlebens* (Istanbul, Istanbul Schrifen Nr. 17, 1943), pp. 278-81; Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, 'Videśī Lekhakṇ kā Mathurā-Varṇan', in Vāsudev Śaraṇ Agravāl, ed., *Sāhitya-vācaspati Seth Kanhaiyālāl Poddār Abhinandan-granth* (Mathurā, Braj-sāhitya Maṇḍal, *saṃvat* 2010 [A.D. 1953]), pp. 827 f.

<sup>16</sup> An image of Balarāma, found near Mathurā, is assigned to the second century B.C. by Vāsudev Śaraṇ Agravāl, 'Brahmanical Images in Mathura', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 5 (1937), 123. The erection of a building at a shrine to Vāsudeva is recorded in a Mathurā inscription of the time of Mahākshatrpa Śodāsa, about the beginning of the Christian era (see Chanda, pp. 169-73). The earliest definite evidence of the cult of the infant Kṛishṇa is a stone relief in the Mathurā museum, of the Kushāṇa period, showing Vāsudeva carrying the new-born Kṛishṇa across the Jamunā. See Vāsudev Śaraṇ Agravāl, 'A Catalogue of the Images of Brahṃā, Viṣṇu and Śiva in Mathurā Art,' *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society*, 22 (1949), 143.

<sup>17</sup> Georg Bühler, 'New Jaina Inscriptions from Mathurā,' *Epigraphia Indica*, 1 (1892), 381, 390.

<sup>18</sup> Christian Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde* (5 vols. in 4. Bonn, H. B. Koenig, 1847-62), 2 (1852), 489, 507; Albrecht Weber, *Indische Studien* (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1873), 13, 490 f.; M. Winternitz, 'Kṛṣṇa-Dramen,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 124.

<sup>19</sup> Dhīrendra Varma, *La Langue braj* (Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1935); and Dhīrendra Varma, *Vrajbhāshā Vyākaraṇ* (Ilāhābād [Allahabad], Rāmnārāyaṇ Lāl, 1937). Kiśorīdās Vājpeyī, *Vrajbhāshā kā Vyākaraṇ* (2nd revised and enlarged ed., Prayāg [Allahabad], Rāmnārāyaṇ Lāl, 1948), pp. 235-56, offers corrections of Varma.

## INTRODUCTION

the foremost literary dialect of Hindī for several hundred years. At the beginning of the last century, it began to lose this pre-eminence, but until a few decades ago Brajbhāshā remained the first language of Hindī poetry. Today the national Kharī Bolī is replacing it in the mainstream of poetry also. The lasting dignity of Brajbhāshā lies in the high quality of its accumulated literature, the heritage of four centuries of creativity which began in full force in the time of Vallabhācārya (ca. 1481–1533). He and his son Viṭṭhalnāth gathered around them a circle of gifted poets known as the *Ashṭachāp*, the Eight Seals.<sup>20</sup> Sūrdās (ca. 1479–1564)<sup>21</sup> and his younger contemporary Nanddās were of special importance in this group. The compositions of the *Ashṭachāp* are still much used and appreciated. Their retelling of the Kṛishṇa legends largely determines the content of the myths which live in the popular mind today. The average Braj dweller does not learn of Kṛishṇa from the *purāṇas* directly, but from the modified vernacular renderings of these great sixteenth-century poets.

The rural people of Mathurā District continued at the time of this study to speak Brajbhāshā as their first language, with some modification in the direction of standard Hindī. In Vṛindāban and Mathurā the linguistic situation is complex. The necessity of using the national language in government work, in schools, and in the press has forced the local dialect to give ground. The average citizen in these two cities apparently speaks Brajbhāshā in the family circle but tends to use standard Hindī on the streets and in business. The Braj dialect keeps a strong hold, however, upon the affections of Kṛishṇa devotees wherever they may be. It is the language of their most-loved religious books, the language of song and sacred story in their temples, and the speech of their stage. Because of the Kṛishṇa cult, the Braj language and the Braj culture have an almost national appeal.

The Hindu faith is heavily predominant in the towns in which this study was conducted. The 1941 census showed the proportion of Muslims to be about 4 percent in Vṛindāban and 19 percent in Mathurā. Between 1947 and 1950, by count of the Vṛindāban municipality, 40 percent of the town's Muslims left for Pakistan. We may assume that an exodus of equal proportions took place in Mathurā. These cities probably preserve the traditional Hindu culture as fully as any city in North India. The industrial system of production has scarcely begun to touch the area. Muslim culture and English education have left their mark, but their penetration has been limited by the

<sup>20</sup> The work of the eight poets is discussed in detail in Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī-sāhitya kā Itihās* (Banāras, Kāśī-nāgarīpracārīṇī Sabhā, samvat 2005 [A.D. 1948]), pp. 155–231; and in Prabhudayāl Mītal, *Ashṭachāp Paricay* (Mathurā, Agravāl Press, samvat 2004 [A.D. 1947]).

<sup>21</sup> Janardan Misra, *The Religious Poetry of Sūrdās* (published Ph.D. dissertation, Königsberg, Albertus Universität, 1934), pp. 1 ff.



communities' economic interest in maintaining old Hindu institutions. Compared with most cities of North India, Mathurā and Vṛindāban are fortresses of social orthodoxy. Traditional regulations regarding the selection, preparation, and consumption of food are widely obeyed. Brahmans are unusually numerous in both cities, and they are honored. Those who are *gosāṁs* (Sanskrit *gosvāmīs*, descendants of the founders of the prevailing religious sects) are highly revered. In the relationship between the castes, however, there is a certain liberalism—not the indifference to caste distinctions which springs from Western education, but the equalitarianism among advanced devotees which became prominent in the *bhakti* movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Devotees of humble caste origins mingle freely in religious assemblies in Braj without arousing anxiety about defilement through bodily contact or the sharing of food. Brahman *paṇḍits* are not respected more than devout *sādhus*, who are accorded the title *vaishṇav* and are commonly addressed as *bābājī*. The formal priestly positions in the numerous temples are generally held by brahmans, but positions of more active religious leadership often fall either to non-brahman householders or to the *bābājīs*, who by birth are of any and every caste and about whose origin it is improper to inquire.

In sectarian affiliation Braj is overwhelmingly Vaishṇava. If any true Śaivas exist, they are inconspicuous, unorganized, and trifling in number. Nevertheless there are two temples of Śiva in Vṛindāban and four large Śiva temples in Mathurā. These temples are frequented by many who are essentially Vaishṇava. Some are persons of utilitarian spirit who are willing to take their petitions to any shrine where they dare hope for aid. Others render to Śiva a merely secondary worship; they make courtesy calls at his temple, as it were, because they know Śiva to be a high-ranking friend and devotee of their own favorite deity, who is Kṛishṇa or perhaps Rāma. The sectarianisms of Braj are inclusive in spirit; all have undergone the influence of Tulsīdās and bear the mark of his catholicity and his rapprochement with orthodox polytheism. The conviction that Kṛishṇa is the Supreme Deity carries no implication, now, that the other gods of Hinduism are contemptible fictions. The worship of Rāma in particular goes on alongside that of Kṛishṇa without friction. In Mathurā there are a number of temples dedicated to Rāma and to Hanumān. In that city the cult of Rāma is a vigorous minority movement, having its own priests, *paṇḍits*, and voluntary laymen's organizations. But in the great majority of the temples of Braj the images in the central shrine are those of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, and their worship predominates.

The religious life of Braj receives form and leadership through its loosely organized sects known as *sampradāyas*. For centuries the major sects have been summed up in a list of four. The oldest traditional list consisted of the



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Rāmānuja or Śrīvaishṇava, the Mādhva, the Viṣṇusvāmī, and the Nimbārka sampradāyas. This old register no longer gives a satisfactory accounting of the sects which are significant in Braj. Only the Nimbārka Sampradāya has kept its position. The Śrīvaishṇavas, centered in South India, are few in Braj, and the Mādhva and Viṣṇusvāmī sects are practically unknown. So these three are now omitted when the local sampradāyas are being enumerated, and the traditional quaternion is completed by the inclusion of three newer sects founded about four hundred years ago: the Vallabha Sampradāya, the Gauṛiyā Sampradāya (the followers of Caitanya), and the Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya founded by Hita Harivaṃśa.

Only a meager literature is available in Western languages on the life and teaching of the Braj sects.<sup>22</sup> This scarcity of information springs partly from a seclusiveness of the sects themselves.<sup>23</sup> Although they are often warmly evangelistic in attitude, their promotional work tends to be done in face-to-face meeting. They are distrustful of the capacity of outsiders to understand their teachings fully and sympathetically in the printed page and have made little effort to reach the reading public of the world at large. Even

<sup>22</sup> The following describe all or most of the sects : S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 3 (1940), 399–444, 4 (1949), 320–448; Haridas Bhattacharyya, ed., *The Cultural Heritage of India* (2nd revised ed. Calcutta, Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, 1953), 3, 333–59, 4, 186–200; Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, Karl J. Trübner, 1913), pp. 62–66, 76–86; J. N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* (Oxford University Press, 1920), pp. 237–40, 304–19; Growse, *Mathurā* (3rd ed.), pp. 190–216; Srisa Chandra Vidyarnava, *Studies in the Vedānta Sūtras and Upanishads* (Allahabad, Sacred Books of the Hindus, XXII, 1919), pp. 66–112. Special works on the Vallabha Sampradāya include Helmuth von Glasenapp, trans. Ishverbai L. Amin, *Doctrines of Vallabhacharya* (Kapadvanj, Shuddhadwaita Samsada, 1959); Jethalal G. Shah, *A Primer of Anu-bhashya* (2nd ed. Kapadvanj, Shuddhadwaita Samsada, 1960); G. H. Bhatt, 'The Puṣṭi-marga of Vallabhacharya', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 9 (1933), 300–06; Lallubhai P. Parekh, *Shrimad Vallabhacharya, His Life, Philosophy and Teachings* (Ahmadabad, Gujarat Press, 1909); Lallubhai P. Parekh, *The Pushti-marga* (Ahmadabad, Gujarat Press, 1911); Anon. [Yadunāth Vrajatānīj], *History of the Sect of the Maharajas* (London, Trübner & Co., 1865) contains much merely sensational matter but also useful translations. On the Gauṛiyā Sampradāya: Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, General Printers and Publishers, 1942); Mahanam Brata Brahmachari, *The Philosophy of Sri Jiva Gosvami* (Chicago, Institute of Oriental Students for the Study of Human Relations, 1937); Nisikānta Sānyāl, *Sri Krishna Caitanya* (Madras, Gaudiya Math, 1933); Nisikānta Sānyāl, *The Erotic Principle and Unalloyed Devotion* (4th ed. Calcutta, Gauriya Mission, 1945); Narendra Nath Law, 'Sri Kṛṣṇa and Sri Caitanya', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 23 (Dec. 1947), 261–99; Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, trans. Srisa Chandra Vasu, *The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādārāyaṇa with the Commentary of Baladeva* (Allahabad, Sacred Books of the Hindus, V, 1912); Girindra Narayan Mallik, *The Philosophy of Vaiṣṇava Religion* (Lahore, Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, 1927). On the Nimbārka Sampradāya: Umesha Mishra, *Nimbarka School of Vedānta* (Allahabad, University of Allahabad Studies, Sanskrit Section, 1940); Nimbārka, Eng. trans. Roma Bose, *Vedānta-Pārijāta-Saurabha and Vedānta-Kaustubha of Śrinivāsa* (Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, No. 259, 1940 f.). On the Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya the only available monograph is in Hindī: Vijayendra Snātak, *Rādhavallabh Sampradāy: Siddhānt aur Sāhitya* (Delhi, National Publishing House, 1957).

<sup>23</sup> Growse, *Mathurā* (3rd ed.), p. 289; Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India* (3 vols. London, William H. Allen & Co., 1838), I, 205 f.

a survey of the complex and varied doctrinal systems of the separate sampradāyas would require time and space that such a book as this cannot afford. We shall characterize them as a group by the theological positions which are common to them all.

The sampradāyas of Braj have as their common heritage the fundamental attitudes of bhakti Hinduism. They are united in a general distaste for Śaṅkara's understanding of God, man, and world as set forth in his *advaita* interpretation of the Vedānta. All four maintain emphatically that the Supreme Godhead is possessed of auspicious qualities, is a personal being, in fact, is Kṛishṇa or the divine pair Rādhākṛishṇa. All reject Śaṅkara's doctrine of *māyā* and hold that the world is real. They teach differing theories regarding the nature of the individual soul (*jīva*) but agree in ascribing to it some degree of separateness from the deity, both in this world and in final beatitude as well. Salvation, for all these sects, is a blissful eternal existence in a loving relationship of some kind with the Divine Person. It is not an absorption into deity which obliterates one's individuality. For attaining eternal blessedness, the only viable path, in the present age at least, is the *bhaktimārga*, or 'way of loving devotion'. It is God's gracious exercise of his divine power on behalf of the devotee at some critical point which ultimately makes his salvation possible. Sometimes the teaching is that prevenient divine grace awakens effective devotion in the devotee; sometimes that the worshiper's devotion evokes in response the deity's gracious saving action.

With differences in emphasis and in theological conception, all four sects now worship Rādhā as well as Kṛishṇa. The dominant theory regarding the nature of Rādhā is that she is Kṛishṇa's *hlādinī śakti* or 'blissful energy', a polar principle within, and not different from, himself. In order to taste with fuller rapture the bliss of his own nature, Kṛishṇa creates his *hlādinī śakti* and enjoys, as lover, communion with himself in this form. The Gauṛiyā and Nimbārka sects, at least, raise this *śakti* doctrine to a place of central importance in the religious life, teaching that the devotee's highest duty and pleasure is to contemplate the dalliance and union of the divine lovers while thinking of himself as an attendant who facilitates their meeting and renders them adoring service. The Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya elevates Rādhā still further, giving her priority over Kṛishṇa and worshiping her as the *ātman* or Supreme Being and the bestower of bliss upon Kṛishṇa as well as upon devotees.

In Vṛindāban the Rādhāvallabha and Nimbārka sects are dominant numerically. Important leaders of the Gauṛiyā sect live there with a body of adherents, but because the primary language of their circle is Bengali and their major ties are with Bengal, they live somewhat apart from the rest of the city. In Mathurā the leading sects are those of Nimbārka and Vallabha,

with the latter perhaps more numerous. The Vallabha Sampradāya in Mathurā derives great prestige from the fact that the largest temple in the city, the Temple of Dvārakādhīś, is controlled by their leaders, the *pushṭi-mārgiyā gosāiṇs*.

In structure the sampradāyas are amorphous bodies that lack many of the characteristics of formal organizations. A nominal headship is ensured by the fact that the *gaddī* or seat of the founder always has an incumbent and that this man, who dwells at the founder's principal residence, is recognized as having pre-eminence among the leaders of the sect. In some sects this position is hereditary in the family of the founder; in others the leadership is in the hands of celibate *vairāgīs*, and the *gaddī* passes from *guru* to disciple. The holder of this central post, together with the heads of the other temples and monastic establishments controlled by the sect, comprise the inner circle of leadership. Around this center lies a second circle made up of the adhering *sādhus*, who have been initiated by teachers belonging to the sect and who wear its distinctive facial markings. Beyond this second circle lies a third, composed of the householders who acknowledge a sectarian allegiance. This lay membership in a sampradāya may be nominal. Many who do not hesitate to identify themselves with a sect are quite unable to name its basic writings or explain any of its doctrines. Braj families nevertheless affiliate themselves clearly with one sect or another, for certain special reasons. First, it continues to be the recognized duty of a father to have his son instructed by a *guru*. So fathers take their sons, at the proper age, to a sectarian leader for instruction and initiation. The sect of the initiating *guru* is considered to be the sect of the boy ever after. Second, every man is expected, on certain social occasions, to wear some forehead mark. These marks are necessarily drawn from a sectarian heraldry. In wearing a particular mark publicly at these times a man proclaims the doctrine and sect which he professes.

Of utmost importance to actors in Mathurā District is the fact that the area is a major center of religious pilgrimage. Throngs arrive daily by bus and by train, in a volume that can be estimated accurately from the income from the pilgrim tax that is collected on every public transport fare into the area. City officials calculate that in twelve months of 1949–50 Mathurā and Vṛindāban were visited by 500,000 pilgrims—almost 1,400 per day. For accommodation of these pilgrims, wealthy and charitable Vaishṇavas have built many *dharmśālās* (lodging-houses) where the pious traveler may stay at little or no cost. One can obtain in Mathurā a list of 70 such lodgings in that city. The *dharmśālās* of Vṛindāban total about 40. A fair number of relatively elderly people reside in Vṛindāban as a place of permanent retirement. Many lease their houses from certain temples under a plan called *bheṇṭ-nāmā*, whereby a single lump-sum payment, reckoned on the basis of



normal life expectancy, brings assurance of a home until death. Released from much financial worry, such retired people spend their time thenceforth largely in religious practices, in going the rounds of the temples, in hearing *kīrtan* and *kathā*, and in attending religious dramas. Occupations related to the spiritual and physical care of these short- and long-term visitors dominate the economy of Vṛindāban. Four hundred and fifty residents of the town held licences from the local Paṇḍā Sabhā in 1950, entitling them to act as guides to the sacred spots. About 200 temples in Vṛindāban are wealthy enough to provide paid employment for a priest, at least on a part-time basis. In both towns cottage industries produce souvenir articles that pilgrims are accustomed to buy. The largest activity of this kind is the hand printing of special kinds of cotton cloth, in which about 500 persons are employed in Vṛindāban and over 2,000 in Mathurā. Mathurā provides employment for many on the railway, in the cantonment, and in the offices of the district government. Thus Mathurā has interests that are not related to the position of the town as a great tīrtha or place of pilgrimage. But in general the flood of pilgrims is the economic lifeblood of both these cities. To the actors who produce religious dramas, they bring wealthy patrons, appreciative audiences, and vital income.

During the sacred seasons when the district is jammed with pilgrims, the heads of the temples and *āśrams* commonly present at their establishments extensive programs of song, reading, or drama for the edification of the general public. Temples gain as well as give on such occasions, in fame and in money. The additional offerings brought by the crowds can be counted on to restore at least in part the sums guaranteed to the artists. The large temples can often plan these programs with confidence either because they receive stable grants regularly from wealthy supporters or because they receive steady income from urban and agricultural properties. The Temple of Raṅgī (Śrī Raṅganātha) in Vṛindāban has been landlord over some 150 villages. The social changes of recent years have disrupted seriously the flow of such grants and rents. In individual cases, the collapse of the prosperity of some prince or zamindar has completely stopped the artistic activities of a temple he once patronized.

The literacy of the throngs seen in Mathurā and Vṛindāban must be inquired into by anyone seeking to understand the place of religious drama there. Among residents of Mathurā 42.5 percent can read and write (males 54.2 percent, females 26.6 percent). In rural Mathurā District the rate falls to 15.3 percent (males 25.3 percent, females 3.1 percent). But for a true impression of the literacy of the average Braj audience one must consider the probable literacy of the large number of pilgrims in any assembly who are residents of rural Uttar Pradesh, or women, or both. Since 1911, when the

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provincial literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh was 3.4 percent, an upward surge in literacy carried the rate to 10.8 percent in 1951. But the superintendent of the 1951 census operations could still say, with ample documentation, 'that this State is one of the world's most illiterate regions'. And the literacy of *rural women* of the province remains at an astonishing 2.1 percent!<sup>24</sup> The presence of large numbers of pilgrims in the Braj towns necessarily means highly illiterate audiences, especially when one considers the non-selectiveness of local customs regarding admission to performances. No performance is private. News of coming dramatic events is circulated about the bazaars, and no one who appears at the appointed place as a Vaishṇava and a devotee can be turned away or can be required to make any payment. An unschooled assembly is guaranteed by the large fraction of the seating space which is filled with women, whatever their geographic origin. The only predominantly literate audience which can be conceived is a quite imaginary one made up entirely of Mathurā men. The dramas examined in this book are not generally produced by illiterates and they do not communicate 'illiterate' material, but they are produced for audiences of low literacy. They are directed toward the needs of nonreaders and employ techniques which are adjusted to the capacity of the illiterate.

Such are the data on Mathurā District that seem necessary to the appreciation of its religious dramas. Additional information may be found in the works of Growse and Dhīrendra Varma, already mentioned. The Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal maintained for some time in Mathurā a continuous study of the culture of the area through its literary journal, *Braj Bhāratī*, and other Hindī publications.<sup>25</sup> Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, former curator of the museum in Mathurā, has published in Hindī a general description of the city and a valuable survey of the political and economic history of the region.<sup>26</sup>

The author arrived in Mathurā in August 1949 intent on finding and describing every traditional form of Hindu religious drama that might survive there. From August 1949 to June 1950 he resided sometimes in Mathurā but more generally in Vṛindāban, studying the local stage by the most direct method. By night and by day he sat among the spectators at every type of performance which he had the opportunity to see. This book is the record of what was seen and heard in those sessions.

<sup>24</sup> Literacy figures and quotation are from Rajeshwari Dayal, *Census of India, 1951, 2, Uttar Pradesh, Part 1-A, Report* (Allahabad, Superintendent of Printing and Stationery, Uttar Pradesh, 1953), 387-92.

<sup>25</sup> The Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal of Mathurā has published two symposia on the history, art and literature of Braj: Satyendra, ed., *Braj-lok-saṃskṛiti* (1948), and Agravāl, ed., *Kanhaiyālāl Poddār Abhinandan-granth*.

<sup>26</sup> Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, *Mathurā-paricay* (Mathurā, Lok Sāhitya Sahayogī Prakāśan, Ltd., 1950); and Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, *Braj kā Itihās* (Mathurā, Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal, 1954).

The first few days in Mathurā revealed that Braj is still a beehive of stage activities. Braj laid out before her visitor dramatic and semidramatic arts in a surprising number of types. In every case it was possible to obtain eventually, by various methods, specimens of the texts used in actual performances. Observation and study made it clear that five quite distinct forms of representational art were in use for the communication of religious lore. Their names in some cases were already known through casual references in Occidental literature, but in no case had the author been able, through Western information or imagination, to surmise their nature correctly. These are the traditional religious dramas which the author found in Braj :

1. *Jhāṅkī*, a tableau of living deities exhibited for worship, enlivened by the devotional songs of the worshipers and by the deities' delivery of homilies in the form of dramatic dialogue
2. The *kathak's* art, which illuminates the words of narrative songs with fleeting impersonations and symbolic gestures
3. The plays of a troupe called the Bhaktamāl Nāṭak Maṇḍalī, which dramatize favorite stories of Vaiṣṇava saints
4. *Rāmlīlā*, a choral recitation of a sacred epic, explained by a running stage commentary in speech and action
5. *Rāslīlā*, a unique composite which brings together the ritual enactment of a central Kṛishṇa myth in dance, with the semi-operatic performance of any one of a vast number of peripheral stories of the Kṛishṇa cycle

The first four in the list above are general North Indian types of performance. They exist in Braj, but Braj is not their special home. The *Rāmlīlā* is performed by amateur actors in every community in North India. *Jhāṅkī* and the art of the *kathak* and the Bhaktamāl Nāṭak Maṇḍalī are brought to Braj by actors residing in other northern centers. The *rāslīlā* stands in a category by itself because it alone is a strict monopoly of actors who reside in Braj. This distinction between dramas of external and indigenous origin is recognized in the division of this book into two parts. It should be remembered, however, that this distinction pertains only to geographical origin, not to geographical outreach. All five dramas are part of the life of all North India. The external types are all seen in Braj, and Braj's own *rāslīlā* is performed throughout the wider region by troupes from Mathurā District.

Although this book excludes all but traditional religious dramas, as a matter of fact little drama of any other kind was found. During 10 months of residence in Braj the author saw two bookish Mahābhārata plays staged by student dramatic clubs. It was said that *naṭaṅkī* troupes might appear in the area in the spring season and stage performances on relatively secular themes, but none appeared in the spring of 1950. These two types, which



correspond to Rosen's second and third categories, are a miniscule part of the local dramatic activity. Four moving-picture houses were operating in Mathurā and Vṛindāban. It is doubtful that their admissions in a year equaled the attendance at the mystery plays. The hieratic Vaishṇava dramas described hereafter dominated the stage activities of the district.

To an impressive degree all the forms of drama named continue to be vibrant with the intense religious feeling which first created them and which they in turn promote in their spectators. The motives which operate in those who patronize, act in, or see these dramas are as complex as those which enter into any other kind of religious activity. For the actors the plays bring wealth and recognition. The generous patron receives a reputation for piety and the gratitude of his neighbors. The spectators are gratified by a sense of protection through participation in a virtuous action.<sup>27</sup> But the continued life of these dramas springs from their power to kindle in all involved the *bhaktiras*, the sentiment of religious devotion to the Deity. Through the plays the Hindu who has suffered the normal strains of scepticism and material obsession re-enters the world of traditional religious truth. There he dwells in the loving emotion which establishes and confirms, for the Vaishṇava, his positive orientation toward the universe.

The Vaishṇava dramas of Mathurā District have an importance that goes far beyond their undoubted function as recreation. They are complexly evolved, extensive in outreach, effective in communicating religious experience, and an important instrument of education in the society in which we find them.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the Maharaja of Rāmnagar's statement to Balwant Gargi on the well-being ensured by the Rāmlīlā : *Folk Theater of India*, p. 111,



Part I

REGIONAL DRAMAS IN THE MATHURĀ  
SETTING





1

## JHĀNKĪ

The standard literature on the Indian theater contains only two allusions to Jhānkī.<sup>1</sup> Both are based on a single sentence written in 1879 by Sourindro Mohun Tagore. In *The Eight Principal Rasas of the Hindus* Tagore remarks: 'The "Jhānkī" or "Tableaux Vivants" of mythological and other figures is exhibited by a certain class of players coming chiefly from Bombay, Mathurā, and other parts of India.'<sup>2</sup> Tagore adds this remark loosely to a paragraph on a dramatic form called *mūrttī*, which he describes as involving a *sūtradhāra*'s explanation of statuesque figures who neither speak nor employ gesture. Arthur Berriedale Keith, in relating this material in *The Sanskrit Drama*, confuses the two forms and refers to jhānkī as a mute spectacle explained by a *sūtradhāra*. Actually no such explainer of the scenes is involved, and although jhānkī is far from the familiar dialogue play, its actors do not always remain mute. As a form of drama, jhānkī defies all the categories to which we are accustomed. It can be defined only by a full description.

A jhānkī performance does not enact any narrative. The situation presented is always the same: Sītā and Rām enthroned, holding, as it were, their durbar (see Plate II). When the reader is told that during an entire two-hour performance the actors scarcely shift in their seats and that for an hour and a half they say nothing at all, he may well wonder by what magic they hold the attention of an audience. Several unusual factors enter into the explanation.

The appeal of jhānkī to its spectators arises from the special religious spirit of the occasions on which it is presented and from the rare environment of religious ideas in which it lives. Jhānkī thrives in a little frequented frontier

<sup>1</sup> Sylvain Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien* (Paris, Émile Bouillon, 1890), p. 152. Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Sourindro Mohun Tagore, *The Eight Principal Rasas of the Hindus* (Calcutta, the author, 1879), p. 21.

of representational art where drama and image worship meet. Jhāṅkī assumes an audience accustomed to engage in idol worship. Most of the activities that go on during an evening of jhāṅkī are similar to those that take place in the course of *pūjā* in a temple. Witnessing the display can become a form of *pūjā* for the Vaiṣṇava because of his belief that an actor, while wearing the special costume and crown of a god or goddess, is not merely the living similitude of the deity represented, but is in fact the abode of that divinity. Such an actor, who is always a Brahman boy under the age of puberty, is called a *svarūp*.<sup>3</sup> In the Rāmlīlā and the rāslīlā as well as in jhāṅkī the deities are represented by svarūps, who are treated with all the deference and worship due to the gods and goddesses temporarily incarnate in them. The very name jhāṅkī, meaning 'a view, a glance', has a special religious sense and refers to the fact that in the drama the devotee sees physically the god of his devotion. He enjoys *darśana* of his god, resident not in an image of stone but in an image of flesh. The traditional Hindu worship which consists in the contemplation of the form of the deity is continued in jhāṅkī and is vivified by a divine response that is direct, personal, and immediate.

Today jhāṅkī players do not live in Mathurā, but they often include the region in their tours. Some troupes come from Janakpur, in Bihar's Muzaffarpur District, and some travel from Ayodhyā, another great North Indian center of the cult of Rāma. In November 1949 a jhāṅkī troupe from Janakpur stayed the month in the dharmśālā of the Birlā Temple north of Mathurā, going out from there to fill many engagements throughout the district. This troupe returned to the area in January 1950 to play to the crowds in Vṛindāban during the Kumbh Melā. The dharmśālās of Vṛindāban housed a jhāṅkī troupe from Ayodhyā as well during that season. The author talked with the members of these troupes in their lodgings and attended several performances of each.

The simpler jhāṅkī exhibitions reproduce the forms of temple worship with little difference beyond the substitution of living images. The author saw one such unadorned session going on in Vṛindāban in the courtyard of a dharmśālā just off a busy commercial street. People were thronging in and out between the thoroughfare and the courtyard. The svarūps were enthroned on a high seat with the crowd swirling below and about them. People were edging forward to make their genuflections and sometimes to leave a small offering. After standing with rapt gaze for a few moments before the incarnate gods, each devotee departed, making room for similar worshipers who were pressing from behind. This process went on and on,

<sup>3</sup> For the background of the word *svarūp* in Vaiṣṇava theology, see Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, especially pp. 181 ff. on the *āveśa* aspect of *svarūpa*.

throughout a considerable period of observation. The normal jhāṅkī performance, however, is held in a more sheltered situation in a home or temple and gives the worshiper an opportunity for a fuller, unhurried interview. Then, the program is enriched by the addition of elements of the sermon and of the recital of sacred music. The nature of such a performance can be communicated best by reporting the personal observations of a certain evening.

The scene was the outer court of the Temple of Mathurānāth, near the crowded heart of Mathurā. The locality was favorable for the gathering together of a large assembly of devotees of Rāma. Despite its dominant Kṛishṇaism, Mathurā has many inhabitants for whom Rāma is the *ishṭadevatā*, or favorite deity. Among the Caube brahmans of Mathurā there are a number of professional paṇḍits who earn their livelihood by reciting and teaching the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās. One of these men was the adviser and teacher of a group of twenty local youths who called themselves the Rāmāyaṇ Saṃkīrtan Samiti. This club was accustomed to meet each night in a house in the Galī Rāvaliyā, a stone's throw from the Temple of Mathurānāth, for an hour's reading of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. A young merchant, a member of this society, had engaged the jhāṅkī troupe to give a performance at the temple and had invited the author to be his guest.

It is eight o'clock on the evening of January 21, 1950. We pass through the portico of the temple without stopping at any ticket booth, for neither here nor at any other of the indigenous dramas is anyone charged any price for admission. We step into the inner court, where a platform has been improvised, and a sofa has been placed on it and covered with rich plush. Potted palms flank this dais on either side. A crowd has gathered in the court, and as we enter, it is in the act of rising to its feet with a great shout of '*Rām Candra jī kī jay!*' The acclamation hails the emergence from behind a backdrop of the svarūps of Sītā and Rām, two boys of 10 or 12 years. They seat themselves on their lofty throne. The distinctive dress of the goddess Sītā is worn by the younger and more delicate lad (female actors are quite unknown to any of the dramas with which this study deals). Worshipers immediately gather about the throne and contend for the privilege of rendering to the deities various traditional services. Someone soon begins to swing the honorific yak-tail whisk (*cañvar*) in slow measured arcs over the heads of the svarūps. An attendant appears with a flaming *āratī* tray<sup>4</sup> and waves it before the deities, and then the assembly is seated. Rām is dressed in

<sup>4</sup> *Āratī* is a rite of worship offered to images and to religious personages of extreme sanctity. A tray bearing a burning lamp or lamps, or burning incense sticks, is rotated in a circle, vertically, before the object of devotion. *Āratī* opens and closes both image-worship and dramatic performances involving svarūps such as *rāslīlā*, *Rāmlīlā* and *jhāṅkī*.



gold-trimmed robes of rich red velvet; Sītā wears the conventional *sārī*, a *dupaṭṭā* or mantilla, and her special tiara. Under the powerful illumination the silver and glass of their crowns glitter like stars. A *sādhū* kneels before the throne and takes upon himself the task of massaging the feet of the deities. The handsome Rām and even more handsome Sītā accept the attentions of their devotees with aloof grace. New arrivals in the courtyard come at once to the front, touch the feet of both the actors with hands or forehead, then turn back and find a seat. A middle-aged *sādhū* arrives at the door. On catching his first glimpse of the actors he utters an affectionate cry of discovery and bears down upon the deities with the open arms and glittering eye of a father greeting a long-absent son. He falls at Rām's feet, encircling his legs with his arms. Rām rewards him by pulling up the flowing nether garments and baring a foot for the touch of the devotee's brow. An old woman offers Sītā a nosegay. Sītā favors the donor with the return of a blossom made precious by the touch of her divine hand. Others come forward and drop garlands around the necks of the pair—taking care not to make bodily contact in doing so, for only the feet of the deities may be touched. The very devout might be content to spend an entire session in such petty services and in sitting at the feet of the *svarūps* with fixed and happy gaze. But there are other features of the program which appeal to wider interests.

On the floor, at the base of the throne, a rectangular space has been kept free of spectators. Along three sides of this square sit musicians with their instruments before them : *sārāṅgī*, *tablā*, harmonium, and *jhāñjh*. The director of these musicians is a man who travels with the troupe. The others have come in from the neighborhood to lend their services at the invitation of the host of the evening. Now and then someone comes forward from the crowd, sits down for a time amidst this orchestra, confers with its director, and sooner or later contributes a song. Very early in the performance the singing begins. For the texts which follow we are indebted to the swift pencils of Candra Prakāś Ācārya and Gopāl Prasād Bensal, of Galī Rāvaliyā :

राम कृष्ण दोऊ एक हैं  
चतुर एक जप नाम ।  
लीलाधारी कृष्ण हैं  
मर्यादामय राम ॥

Rām and Kṛishṇa, the two are one;  
Repeat it as one name, O wise man !  
Kṛishṇa is the Frolicsome One,  
Rām is the soul of propriety !

In entering Mathurā, the worship of Rām has come to Kṛishṇa's very capital, yet neither the incarnate Rām nor any other person present feels that it challenges the position of the established Lord of Mathurā in any way. And

Rām listens with equanimity, whatever the divine name may be in the petitions sent up to him in the evening's songs:

घनश्याम तज्जसे यह अर्ज है  
 कुछ ऐसा मेरा सुधार हो  
 इस तन में लगी तलाश हो  
 इस मन में तेरे ही प्यार हो ॥  
 तेरी चाह में ही चढ़ा रहूं  
 तेरे द्वार पर ही पड़ा रहूं  
 कदमों पे तेरा अड़ा रहूं  
 चाहे मुझ पे कष्ट हज़ार हों ॥  
 तेरी याद दिल में किया करूं  
 तुझे धन्यवाद दिया करूं ॥

Ghanśyām, this is my petition to Thee:  
 May there be such a reform in me  
 That in my body there may be an eager quest—  
 That in this heart there may be a love for Thee alone !

May I soar on in my desire for Thee !  
 May I remain constantly at Thy door,  
 May I cling stubbornly at Thy feet  
 Even with a thousand woes upon me !  
 May I go on remembering Thee in my heart  
 And give Thee thanks still.

Paṇḍit Parmeśvarī Datt Vyās now rises to his feet. He is a professional teacher of the Rāmāyaṇa and the adviser of the neighborhood club, mentioned above, for the daily recital of the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās. With droll gestures he sings a semi-humorous song. It is in praise of the devotion of Śabarī, the jungle woman, who gave the homeless Rām her utmost offering, the scrubby fruits of the forest. The words are sung to a pronounced rolling rhythm:

भिलनी के खट्टे मीठे बेर<sup>५</sup>  
 हमारा जिया बेरन पे ॥  
 राम को देख शिवरी<sup>६</sup> हो गइ दिवानी ॥  
 चुन चुन के लायी मीठे बेर  
 हमारा जिया बेरन पे ॥  
 अैसे रसीले कबहूँ न खाये  
 एक बेर लक्ष्मण को दिया  
 पीछे को फेंक दिया बेर ॥  
 शिवरी के खट्टे मीठे बेर  
 हमारा जिया बेरन पे ॥  
 लक्ष्मण जती के शक्ति लगी जब  
 हुआ सजीवन<sup>७</sup> बूटी बेर  
 हमारा जिया बेरन पे ॥



हनुमान तब पर्वत लाये  
 नेक न करी अबेर ॥  
 शिवरी के खट्टे मीठे बेर  
 हमारा जिया बेरन पे ॥

The Bhil woman's sweet-and-sour plums<sup>5</sup>—  
*Those plums have taken our fancy!*  
 On seeing Rām, Śabarī<sup>6</sup> went daft!  
 Picking and choosing them, she brought sweet plums—  
*Those plums have taken our fancy!*  
 Saying, 'We have never eaten such juicy ones!'  
 Rām gave one plum to Lakshmaṇ.  
 He tossed it away behind him.  
 Śabarī's sweet-and-sour plums—  
*Those plums have taken our fancy!*  
 When self-controlled Lakshmaṇ was struck by the Śakti weapon  
 The plum proved to be the *saṃjīvanī* herb.<sup>7</sup>  
*Those plums have taken our fancy!*  
 When Hanumān brought the mountain  
 He delayed not a moment.  
 Śabarī's sweet-and-sour plums—  
*Those plums have taken our fancy!*<sup>8</sup>

After several solos of this kind, the director of the music gives the audience an opportunity to participate through the singing of kīrttan. The following is one of those used. A leader stands and sings out the lines of the song itself in a clear strong voice. The entire assembly joins in the refrain of 'Rādhē Kṛishnā, Rādhē Kṛishnā!'

सब प्रेम से मिलकर जय बोलो  
 राधे कृष्णा राधे कृष्णा  
 खुद आके प्रभु दर्शन देंगे  
 राधे कृष्णा राधे कृष्णा !  
 द्रोपदी का चीर बढ़ाया था  
 गजराज को ग्राह से बचाया था  
 वोह कैसे कष्ट निवारी हैं  
 राधे कृष्णा राधे कृष्णा !

<sup>5</sup> The *ber*, here rendered 'plum', is more precisely the jujube, fruit of the tree *Badara* or *Zizyphus jujuba*.

<sup>6</sup> *Śivarī* is a dialectical corruption of the name Śabarī or Śavarī.

<sup>7</sup> The Śakti, Meghnād's magic weapon, struck Lakshmaṇ such a deadly blow that his life was saved only by Hanumān's timely arrival with the healing *saṃjīvanī* herb, here identified as the *ber*. See Tulsīdās, *Rāmcārītmaṇas*, ed. Hanumānprasād Poddār (Gorakhpur, Gītā Press, saṃvat 2004 [A.D. 1947]), pp. 761, 768.

<sup>8</sup> This song is an example of popular elaboration of scriptural narrative with details not found in the literary records. Compare this version with the bare incident as found in the text of Tulsīdās, p. 611; and of Vālmiki, *The Rāmāyaṇ of Vālmiki*, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith (Benares, E. J. Lazarus & Co., 1915), Book III, Canto LXXV, pp. 383 f.

सब प्रेम से मिलकर...

त्रेता में रावण मारा था  
द्रापर में कंस पछारा था  
वोह जैसे असुर संहारी हैं  
राधे कृष्णा राधे कृष्णा !

सब प्रेम से मिलकर...

गोपिन संग प्रेम बढ़ाया था  
वृन्दावन रास रचाया था  
वोह जैसे लीलाधारी हैं  
राधे कृष्णा राधे कृष्णा !

सब प्रेम से मिलकर...

All cry with love in unison, 'Hail,  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*  
The Lord will come indeed and show himself.  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*'

He lengthened the cloth of Draupadī,  
He saved the elephant king from the crocodile.<sup>9</sup>  
He is such a remover of trouble !  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*

All cry with love...

In the *Tretā* Age he killed Rāvaṇ,  
In the *Dvāpar* he dashed down Kaṇṣ.  
He is such a killer of demons !  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*

All cry with love...

He promoted love with the cowherd girls,  
He created the *rās* in Vṛindāban.  
He is such a frolicsome one !  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*

All cry with love in unison, 'Hail,  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*  
The Lord will come indeed and show himself.  
*O Rādhākṛishṇa, O Rādhākṛishṇa !*'

A beautiful little girl of about nine years comes forward to the musicians now to offer to sing a song. The whisper goes about that she is a brahman girl named Kṛishṇābāī. She waits with dignity for the notes of the harmonium, then raises a clear little voice:

हे प्रभु अबतो लेहु अपनाई ॥  
मैं सेवक तुम स्वामी सिरोमणि  
अजहू तो कहा अवसाई ॥  
हे प्रभु अबतो लेहु अपनाई ॥

<sup>9</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Śāstrulu & Sons, Madras, 1937), *skandha* 8, *adhyāyas* 2-3.

तव पद कमल मोर मन मधुकर  
निसिदिन रहत लुभाई ॥

हे प्रभु अबतो लेहु अपनाई ॥

मोहि न चाहिये संपदा जग की  
नाथ सुनी मैं बड़ाई ॥

हे प्रभु अबतो लेहु अपनाई ॥

कृष्णा दासी यही वर माँगत  
चरन कमल लिपटाई ॥

हे प्रभु अबतो लेहु अपनाई ॥

O Lord, now, at last, accept me !  
I am thy servant, Thou art the diadem-jewel among masters:  
Shall I be helpless even today ?<sup>10</sup>  
*O Lord, now, at last, accept me !*

On Thy lotus feet my heart, a black bee,  
Remains fascinated day and night.  
*O Lord, now, at last, accept me !*

I do not desire the world's wealth;  
I have heard the praise of Thee, O Lord!  
*O Lord, now, at last, accept me !*

Kṛishṇā Dāsī<sup>11</sup> implores this boon only:  
To entwine Thy lotus feet !  
*O Lord, now, at last, accept me !*

Other vocalists followed. Some were men whom the author had seen in the musicians' row at numerous religious meetings in Mathurā. The public demand for music is sufficient to enable a number of persons of the town to earn a livelihood by such appearances. The general taste for music and poetry is an important element in the appeal of jhāṅkī. The attention of the entire crowd was held quite successfully for an hour and a half by solos, kīrtans, and instrumental music.

A second interest-holding feature of jhāṅkī is the element called *updeś*, 'instruction'. In content it is a sermon, but in form it is a dialogue between the two enthroned actors. In this phase of the evening's presentation jhāṅkī comes nearest to being true drama. As our evening at the Temple of Mathurā-nāth was beginning to grow late, the musicians were directed to put down their instruments. Word went around that the svarūps were about to give their updeś. The crowd hushed. Rām and Sītā drew themselves up with great dignity, waited for silence, looked at each other, and smiled. Then

<sup>10</sup> The Indian master has a solemn obligation to succor and protect his clients in emergencies.

<sup>11</sup> The incorporated signature (*chāp*) of the Braj poet Kṛishṇa Dās, member of the famous Ashṭachāp. See Chap. 1, note 20.

Rām began to speak with the deliberate regal diction of a most august sovereign. In the course of the dialogue which followed, the actors used one simple gesture of the hand and showed occasional animation of the face, but exhibited no other bodily motion. The discourse which the svarūps presented on that evening is of theological interest for its conception of the role of the śakti, and for its ideas on prevenient grace and on the purpose of the incarnations. Since it illustrates trends in the thought of the Rāma cult, we give here the whole of our almost complete record of the dialogue.

The scene, we may presume, is the highest heaven. Although it is Rām and Sītā whom we actually see, we must understand that the Rām incarnation has not yet occurred. They speak in their capacity as Parameśvara and his śakti, sources of the universe and of all *avatāras*, rulers even over the *devas* Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

RĀM :

हे श्री प्राण बल्लभे जगत की उत्पत्ति का कारण उमा ब्रह्माणी निश्चय करके आपके आश्रित हैं अर्थात् आपकी कृपा से अनन्त कोटि ब्रह्माण्ड का नाश पालन करती हैं। इस कारण आपके उदास होने का क्या कारण है।

O Mistress beloved as life! Cause of the genesis of the world! Umā and the wife of Brahmā are quite dependent on you; it is by your grace that they destroy and protect endless *koṭis* of universes. So what is the reason for your dejection?

SĪTĀ :

हे श्री प्राण प्यारे मेरी दृष्टि आज मर्त्य-लोक में पहुँची। मैं वहाँ के जनों की दुर्दशा देखकर कुछ मलीन हो गयी। हमारे और आपके द्वारा ही मनुष्य का जन्म है और मनुष्य प्रायः कर्मवश दुःख को ही प्राप्त हैं। वे क्यों नहीं शान्ति से रहते।

O Dear-as-Life, today my vision extended to the world of mortals. Seeing the wretched condition of the people there, I became somewhat sad. It is through you and me that man is born, and (yet) man almost always, through his deeds, incurs affliction. Why do they not live in peace?

RĀM :

बिष्णु शिव हमारे भय से अपने कार्य में नियत रहते हैं लेकिन मनुष्य मुझ से वैर कर बुरे मार्गों पर चलते हैं। मैं तो इनके साथ खेलना चाहता हूँ वरन् ये मेरी ओर देखते भी नहीं। जैसे विषैला कीड़ा विष ही चाहता है वैसे ही ये संसारी जीव मुझको नहीं भजते।

Viṣṇu and Śiva remain steady in their duties for fear of us, but *men* turn against me and move on evil paths! I wish to sport with them, but they do not so much as look at me. Just as a poisonous insect wants only poison, just so do these worldly souls not think of me.

SĪTĀ :

माया में मनुष्य फँसे हैं। माता पिता पुत्र के दुर्गुणों पर ध्यान नहीं देते वरन् उसका पालन करते हैं।

Men are ensnared by māyā. Parents do not dwell upon the vices of a son, but they cherish him!

RĀM:

युग युग में मनुष्य की शान्ति के हेतु हमारे सत्व रूप प्रकट होते हैं। मैं ने ऋषियों के द्वारा स्मृति ग्रन्थ पुराण को बनाया। और यह घोषणा करके कि यह जगत चलायमान है इस से एकमात्र मेरा ध्यान मैं ने बताया।

In age after age for the sake of the peace of man my essential forms [i.e. avatāras] are manifested. I created through the sages the books of sacred tradition and the *purāṇas*. And after proclaiming that this world is fleeting I advised them to meditate, therefore, upon me alone.

SĪTĀ:

हे श्री प्राण प्यारे यह धाम धन धान्य स्त्री की माया पुरुषों को मोह लेती है। इस कारण वह हमारी सेवा और सुख को भूल जाते हैं। उस में उनका क्या दोष। . . .

O Dear-as-Life, this delusion of house, wealth, grain, and woman fascinates man. That is why they become oblivious to our service and its pleasure. What fault is it of theirs? (She goes on to urge that they now take birth on earth yet again for the salvation of men.)

RĀM:

हे प्रिया जी माया की आज्ञानुसार पृथिवी पर अवतार लेने से वेद झूठे हो जाएँगे लोगों में वह भावना न रहेगी।

मैं ने शरणागत की रक्षा हेतु प्रतिज्ञा कर रखी है।

Darling, by my descending to earth in conformity with the requirements of *māyā*, the Vedas will be falsified [i.e. the *nirguṇa* teaching of the Upanishads will be undermined]: people will not have the old respect for them.

(But) I have vowed to protect those who come for shelter.

SĪTĀ:

हे श्री प्राण प्यारे यदि जीव हमारी शरण में आये तब हमारी क्या बड़ाई।

O Dear-as-Life, what credit is it to us to protect souls if *they have come to us* for shelter?

RĀM (agreeing):

हे श्री प्रिया जू आपकी इस कृपा को धन्यवाद है। सबही देह-धारियों के कल्याण का मुख्य साधन आपकी ही कृपा है। आपकी विश्व-माधुरी ने जगत को तथा हमको मोहित कर लिया है।

O darling, thank you for this compassion of yours! For all flesh the principal means of salvation is your grace. Your sweetness to all has enchanted the world and myself as well.

The actors finish. A wave of enthusiasm sweeps through the onlookers and breaks forth in a spontaneous shout of '*Rām Candra jī kī jay!*' Grasping the moment, someone leads forth in a familiar *kīrtan*. The whole assembly provides the thundrous chorus:

शिवजी के दमरू से निकला

रघुपति राघव राजा राम !

नारद की वीणा से निकला

पतित पावन सीता राम !



अर्जुन के गाण्डीव से निकला  
 मधुसूदन जय घनश्याम !  
 शिवजी के दमरू से निकला  
 रघुपति राघव राजा राम !

From the drum of Śiv came forth—  
 'Lord of the Raghus, King Rām the Rāghav !'  
 Came forth from Nārād's lute—  
 'Sītā and Rām, purifying the guilty !'  
 From Arjun's bow Gāṇḍīv came forth—  
 'Victory to the Slayer of Madhu, to the Cloud-Dark One !'  
 From the drum of Śiv came forth—  
 'Lord of the Raghus, King Rām the Rāghav !'

The meeting moves to a close. The wicks of the āratī lamps are lit. An attendant belonging to the troupe stands before the deities and rotates the tray of flickering lights. The entire audience rises to its feet and joins in the concluding āratī song:

मैं तो आरती उतारूँ  
 सिया राम जी की रे !  
 हृदय के कपट खोल  
 भक्ति भाव सों ही डोल  
 मधुर नाम बोल बोल  
 चरण छवि निहारूँ  
 सिया राम जी की रे !  
 मैं तो आरती उतारूँ  
 सिया राम जी की रे !

O let me wave the āratī lamp  
 of the revered Sītā and Rām !  
 Opening the door of my heart,  
 Swaying with devout emotion,  
 Calling the sweet name o'er and o'er,  
 May I behold the beauty of the feet  
 of the revered Sītā and Rām !  
 O let me wave the āratī lamp  
 of the revered Sītā and Rām !

The performer of the āratī steps aside and the mass of onlookers, already standing, now presses forward for the leave-taking of their gods. Individuals strain to reach and touch the feet of the svarūps. The deities stoop slightly now and then to touch a hand or a head. An attendant standing a little to one side is holding the āratī tray, its wicks still smouldering. On the tray lies a crisp new Rs 10 note, the contribution to the troupe of the host of the evening. Beside it lie a number of small coins dropped by the departing

guests. During the farewells a lone vocalist continues his song at the harmonium; he is the one musician of the evening who is a member of the troupe. The svarūps retire behind the curtain. The last hangers-on join the retreating crowd in the general search for sandals at the gate.

The leader of this troupe was Rām Pratāp Śaraṇ of the village Sītāmaṇḥī, legendary birthplace of Sītā, near Janakpur in Bihar. The other troupe active in Braj was led by Rām Dulārī Śaraṇ of Vāsudev Ghāṭ in Ayodhyā. Both parties consisted of two child svarūps and two adults. The tie which held these groups together was business interest, not blood relationship. Organizationally the enterprises were the personal proprietorships of the men mentioned. The masters and the svarūps were bound by the terms of contracts made with the young actors' parents, who received an agreed monthly sum as wages. The functions and titles of the adult members of the troupes do not seem to be standardized by tradition. Rām Pratāp Śaraṇ called himself the *gavaiyā* ('singer') or *saṃgītācārya* ('music-master') and referred to his associate as the *śringārī* ('adornor'). Rām Dulārī Śaraṇ accepted the title *svāmī* from his people, and referred to his chief assistant as the doer of *saṃgīt kā kām*—the musician. In his troupe a servant handled the costumes, garlands and cosmetics.

The musicians of these troupes are themselves prepared to provide all the music for their exhibitions if need be. The author has seen the Ayodhyā group sing and play before a nonparticipating audience in Vṛindāban with results that were not inspiring. Appropriate musical offerings by the host and his guests are needed and welcomed. It is considered permissible for a devotee who is in an ecstasy of devotion to dance before the svarūps, but such displays are infrequent.

Each of the troupes had at its command a repertoire of about six discourses (*updeś*), most of which are taken from the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās. Among the passages used are Rām's discourse on the characteristics of good and wicked people, and his speech at the time of Vibhīṣaṇ's surrender.<sup>12</sup> A few are monologues delivered by Rām alone; the majority are dialogues. The master of the Ayodhyā troupe says that he takes discourses from other books as well, including the *Bhagavadgītā* and Nābhājī's *Bhaktamāl*. The discourse reproduced above was composed for the troupe from Bihar by a devotee named Rām Snehī Śaraṇ, a resident of Janakpur.

The costumes worn by Rām and Sītā are generally similar to those used in the *Rāmlīlā*. Friendly onlookers at a performance at Śraut Muni Āśram in Vṛindāban helped the author identify the principal articles of dress and

<sup>12</sup> Tulsīdās, p. 877, *dohā* 36 ff., p. 694, *dohā* 41 ff.



ornament. Rām always wears a distinctive high cylindrical crown (*mukut*) of silver, topped with a white peacock feather (*turrā*). To the back of the crown is attached an aura or halo (*kirīt*) composed of a sunburst of silver rays fixed in the vertical plane of the shoulders. Locks of false hair (*laṭ*) fall to the lower neck. The upper garment is the distinctly royal *cogā*, of knee length, fastened in front only by a sash. The nether garment is a *dhotī* of yellowish color called a *pītāmbar*. Personal ornaments include a pearl nose pendant (*bulāk*), golden earrings (*kuṇḍal*), close-fitting golden necklaces (*kaṇṭhā*), heavy silver anklets (*karūlā*), and golden bracelets (*karā*). A circular spot of metal or pearl is applied to the chin with sandalwood paste. Like Kṛishṇa, Rām may wear around his neck the *banmālā*, a very long garland of five sorts of flowers, supposedly plucked in the forest. From the back of Rām's head (as from Kṛishṇa's), there hangs down a long pennant-shaped streamer of dark cloth dotted with silver spangles. This is said to represent the deity's *coṭi* or queue.

Sītā wears above her sārī the shawl-like dupaṭṭā or *oṛhnī*. Her crown is simpler than Rām's, having no cylinder to give it height. A radiant crest is fixed transversely across the head. On a gold band which crosses her brow a half-moon (*candrikā*) is fixed in mid-forehead. Sītā, like her husband, wears the *turrā*, *bulāk*, *kaṇṭhā*, and *banmālā*. Her own special articles of jewelry are a pearl necklace (*motīmālā*), loose-fitting anklets of silver link (*pājeb*), and a mirror-ring (*ārasī*) worn on the thumb.

The players in their wanderings follow no planned itinerary but move in whatever direction invitations lead. The bids of people of the four castes are acceptable to the masters of the troupes. In making arrangements for their exhibitions they do not bargain beforehand regarding payment but depend on the generosity of the host. The usual invitation is to the home of a wealthy Vaishṇava, who commonly provides food and lodging for a number of days as well as money compensation. The facilities which Braj provided were unusual because the players were lodged in dharmśālās and made appearances in the many temples, āśrams, and other religious institutions of the area. When asked about the geographical limits of their wanderings, the jhāṅkī players spoke of travels to Calcutta in the east, to the Panjab in the west, and even to Rāmeśvaram in the far south. But it was clear that Uttar Pradesh and Bihar comprise their usual touring ground. Rām Pratāp Śaraṇ was able to name twelve troupes which tour from Janakpur. Rām Dulārī Śaraṇ said that Ayodhyā sends out seven.

Almost nothing can be offered on the history of jhāṅkī. The earliest reference found remains S. M. Tagore's publication of 1879 ! The players of our acquaintance believe that their profession came into existence about 300 years ago, soon after the death of Tulsīdās. They have no developed

tradition to this effect, written or oral.<sup>13</sup> Rām Dulārī Śaraṇ reports from his personal experience that jhāṅkī was greatly stimulated in living memory by the long and generous patronage of Mahant Rām Vallabh Śaraṇ of Golāghāṭ in Ayodhyā. Available biographical material tells us that this mahant's career in Ayodhyā extended from 1880 to about 1930 and confirms that he was indeed a patron of mystery players of all sorts.<sup>14</sup> A small suggestion of a longer history is found in Sylvain Lévi's account of certain spectacles which he saw 60 years ago in Nepal.<sup>15</sup> The *tableaux vivants* of Rāma and other deities displayed there on floats in the *māghayātrā* and other processions are similar to jhāṅkī and may be remotely related historically.

<sup>13</sup> Balwant Gargi describes a tableau, akin to jhāṅkī, that is staged as part of the annual Rāmlīlā performance at Caukā Ghāṭ in Banāras: *Folk Theater of India*, p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> Basdeo Narayan Sinha, *Vaishnavism* (Patna, the author, 1929), pp. 120–26. Mevārām Paṇḍit, *Śrīsādguru Sevī* (Ayodhya, Rāmvidhuśaraṇ, A.D. 1936).

<sup>15</sup> Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal* (3 vols. Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1905–07), 2, 40 f., 368.



## THE KATHAK

I have never seen, nor do I hope to see, better acting than I saw once in Lucknow, when an old man . . . a poet and dancer and a teacher of many, many dancing girls . . . sang a Herd-Girl's 'complaint to the mother of Krishna'. This famous dancer, whose name is Binda Deen, is a devout Brahman, well enough off, for he used to receive £100.0.0 or more in a single night from appreciative Rajas; he will sing, and his nephew will dance, at any time at his own house, for any neighbor or townsman, for quite a small fee. He says that it ought not to be difficult for his own friends to see or hear him. Thus, before an audience of pupils and neighbors, this old man sat on the ground and sang his poem. Picking up a scarf, he used it as a veil . . . and no one could have remembered that he was anything but a shy and graceful young girl, telling a story with every sort of dramatic gesture of the hand and eyes. She told how Krishna had stolen the butter and curds, what pranks he played, of his love-making and every sort of naughtiness. Every feature of the face, every movement of the body and hands was intentional, controlled, hieratic; not all his own devotion to Krishna spoiled his art to the least degree.

But such an action-song as this did not belong to him, or depend on his genius for its being, even though he may have composed the particular words of it; it belonged to the race, and its old vision of a cowherd god. Nor would it, or any Indian acting, have had much significance for an audience not already familiar with all its episodes and ideas and all the conventional gestures (dramatic symbols) expressing them.<sup>1</sup>

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy penned this memory-picture more than half a century ago. He is now an old man indeed who has seen Bindā Dīn in person. But Bindā's fame still re-echoes in North India, and the kathak's profession which he followed still lives on. Many publications of the last forty years have drawn attention to the sophisticated kathak dance and have described its footwork and timing,<sup>2</sup> but Coomaraswamy's description brings out a

<sup>1</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, 'Notes on Indian Dramatic Technique', *Mask*, 6 (1914), 124.

<sup>2</sup> La Meri, 'Dancing in India', *Indian Art and Letters*, 13 (1939), 17 f., and La Meri, *The Gesture Language of the Hindu Dance* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1941), pp. 16-18; Herbert A. Popley, *The Music of India* (Calcutta, Association Press, 1921), pp. 81 f.; Projesh Banerji, *Dance of India* (rev. ed. Allahabad, Kitabistan, 1947), pp. 152-57; Nataraj Vashi, 'The Hindu Dance', *Art and Letters: India and Pakistan*, 22 (1948), 50 f.; Kay Ambrose, *Classical Dances and Costumes of India* (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1950), pp. 75-83; Usha Chatterji, *La Dance hindoue* (Paris, Les Éditions Véga, 1951), pp. 120 ff.; Faubion Bowers, *The Dance in India* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1957).

feature of the art which has not been given sufficient attention: that the kathak is an *actor* as well as a dancer. Here we shall deal with the dramatic aspect of the kathak's work.

In 1950 there still lived in Vṛindāban a pupil of a pupil of the great Bindā Dīn, a true professional kathak, one Nand Kiśor. Later in the chapter several of Nand Kiśor's songs will be used to demonstrate the unusual type of dramatic art to which they belong.

Before going further we should note that in various other parts of India there are persons called kathaks who are not of the profession we are discussing. Evidently the name and the art have undergone a long and complex evolution and, as a result, the kathaks of Maharashtra and Bengal differ significantly from those of North India. The kathaks of Maharashtra are mentioned by a writer of Western India as popular sermonizers upon the Rāmāyaṇa.<sup>3</sup> In Bengal, according to Dinesh Chandra Sen and other writers, there is a class of Brahman reciters of similar name and function who declaim the epics and purāṇas and explain them in Bengali. One account of them says:

The *kothuks* are the expounders of the Poorans and other shastras. They sit on a Vedi, or raised seat, and address the audience on incidents appertaining to the Shastras, supplementing the same with explanations of their own, and singing songs bearing on the subject treated. This is done by one individual among them. Shreedhur Kothuk was the most distinguished of these men and composed several songs of great merit.<sup>4</sup>

This type of lector-expounder is well known in North India but not by the ancient name of kathak. He is called a *kathāvācak*. On any day of the year one can find a kathāvācak at work somewhere in Vṛindāban with a cluster of listeners about him. His function is still the public reading of sacred and semi-sacred texts in Sanskrit or Hindī. The kathak with whom this chapter deals follows a related profession but one which is clearly distinguishable from that of these reciters and expositors.

A second confusion in names arises from the fact that many in North India are entitled to be called kathak because of their caste but are not kathaks by livelihood. Ethnological manuals show that a kathak caste, usually dignified with a place among the lower orders of brahmans, is fairly well represented

<sup>3</sup> Bālkrishṇa Ātmarām Gupte, *Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials* (2nd ed. Calcutta, Thacker Spink & Co., 1919), p. 194; Nagesh Wishwanath Pai, *Stray Sketches in Chakmakpore* (Bombay, the author, 1894), pp. 23–27; Ganeshji Jethabhai, *Indian Folklore* (Limbdi, H. S. Dubal, 1903), pp. 221 f. For a bibliography on similar reciters of the epics, see F. Max Müller, *India: What Can It Teach Us?* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883), p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Denonath Ganguli, 'Bengali Language', *Calcutta Review*, 98 (1894), 113; Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, pp. 585–96; Protap Chandra Roy's letter reported in American Oriental Society, *Proceedings in New Haven*, October 1886, p. ii; Sir John Budd Phear, *The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon* (London, Macmillan and Co., 1880), p. 19.



throughout eastern Uttar Pradesh.<sup>5</sup> The traditional caste occupations are dancing (in which they are credited with superior artistry) and serving as teachers, managers, and musical accompanists to dancing-girls. But the caste shows great mobility, perhaps because hereditary selection cannot prevail strictly in a profession for which unusual talent is a requisite. Many have been admitted to the occupation and to the caste who were not kathak by birth,<sup>6</sup> and on the other hand, we find evidence that hundreds claim the caste name who could not possibly be kathaks by profession. William Crooke's figures from the census of 1891 show astonishing numbers of kathaks in some fairly small cities, e.g. Gorakhpur 569, Āzamgarh 215, Rae Bareilly 210, and Partābgarh 149.<sup>7</sup> It cannot be imagined that more than a fraction of these people made their living as dancers or dancing-masters, even in the heyday of the *nāc*. Those who are kathak only by caste are of no concern to us in this study.

Lastly, a clear distinction is not always kept between the true kathak and certain persons who have studied with kathaks for a time and are then able to dance more or less in the kathak style. Among these are a number of artists of the modern stage and screen who occasionally perform a kathak dance. They are not kathaks. Nor is the traditional dancing-girl of North India, the *nācnī*, a kathak. Often her teacher is a kathak, but she herself may be of any caste origin, and her place in his house is that of a trainee, not that of a full disciple. He imparts to her as much of his art as will be appropriate to her calling. The kathak remains, artistically as well as socially, superior and apart.

The kathaks proper of North India can be found earning a living in a wide range of activities involving dance. They have become masters of their special

<sup>5</sup> Sir Henry Miers Elliot, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore, and Distribution of the Races of the North Western Provinces of India*, I, ed. John Beames (rev. ed. London, Truebner & Co., 1869), 152; Rev. M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes as Represented at Benares* (Calcutta, Thacker Spink & Co., 1872), pp. 273 f.; John C. Nesfield, *Brief View of the Caste System of the North-western Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad, North-western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1885), pp. 44 f.; William C. Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-western Provinces and Oudh*, 3 (Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Printing, 1896), 172-76.

<sup>6</sup> Nand Kiśor became a kathak by initiation and training, not by birth, and counts his predecessors as a chain of gurus, not ancestors. Any brahman capable of reading the scriptures, he says, is eligible for training as a kathak. He complains that many men of base caste manage to get training as dancers; thereupon they add kathak to their name, and their children cling to it and to the claim of high caste standing which it entails. Greater irregularities than this seem to have occurred: Crooke finds among their *gotra* names not only brahman gotras but designations of tribal origin. The brahman standing of the caste is therefore not unquestioned. James Prinsep in 'Census of the Population of the City of Benares', *Asiatic Researches*, 17 (1832), 495, lists kathaks among the śūdras. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, half a century later, says: 'They affect to be of high caste, equal in fact to the Rajpoots, and nearly equal to the Brahmans.' Other writers report general acceptance of their claim to brahman status.

<sup>7</sup> Crooke, p. 175.



tradition through a long apprenticeship. Although always males, some of the less respectable manage dancing-girls, and some descend to dancing in *naṭaṅkī*, a popular operatic show. But the traditional centers of the art have been the temples of the gods and the courts of the *rājās* and an occasional free-thinking *nawāb*. There the kathaks enjoyed the appreciation of cultured Hindu audiences, were free to dwell upon Hindu religious themes, and were formerly more amply supported with money and acclaim.

Nand Kiśor Kathak has remained true to the old religious preoccupations of his tradition. At the Temple of Ānandī Bāī in Vṛindāban at half-past seven every evening Nand Kiśor performs his dance and sings before the images of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa.

Nand Kiśor's services earn him no fee. His reward is a daily portion of the *prasād*, the food offered to the idols. The author has seen him trying to supplement this dole by playing the drums (*tablās*) in the Temple of Govind-dev for a *kathāvācak*, with whom he shared the meager fruits and coppers offered by the listeners. Nand Kiśor says he is willing to go on tour whenever called from the city by any prince or wealthy devotee, but one never fails to find him in Vṛindāban. Though he has a long succession (*pīṛhī*) of teachers behind him, he has no successor. His only pupil gave up the dance to become a railway worker. Nand Kiśor confided that few appreciate the kathak songs nowadays; taste in music has changed, and 'soon the profession will be ended'. It must be admitted that men of Nand Kiśor's kind represent the interests and aesthetic tastes of the elite of a society that is passing away. They are neither willing nor able to solicit the support of the new wealthy classes of the cities. Were it not for the literati's new interest in preserving the indigenous artistic traditions, there would be little hope for the survival of any fragment of this art.

Nand Kiśor was born in Rohilkhand, just before the turn of the century, of a Kānyakubja brahman family. His father, a village schoolmaster, sent him to a *pāṭhśālā* in Farukhābād to study Sanskrit. Instead, he secretly studied the dance under Bābū Rām Kathak. His father eventually became aware of the diversion and regularized it by pledging his son in open discipleship to the kathak. Nand Kiśor served a five-year apprenticeship at the end of which Bābū Rām declared him a finished performer and allowed him to go. Nand Kiśor danced for the Rājā of Oel at Lakhīmpur for five years. Then, when he was about 30, his wife died. Her death moved him to settle in sacred Vṛindāban. There he remained, unmarried, and has served in the Temple of Ānandī Bāī ever after.

After Nand Kiśor had been acquainted with the author for several months, the temple authorities gave the kathak unprecedented permission to bring the foreigner into the precincts to see his performance in its daily setting. The

dancing-place was the floor of a verandah across the courtyard from the open shrine, in a direct line of vision from the images. The musicians had arranged their instruments about an open rectangle. On its three sides sat the players of the small cymbals (*jhāñjh*), of the two drums (*tablā* and *bāyāñ*), and of the harmonium. (Nand Kiśor considers the harmonium a very poor substitute for the viol-like *sārañgī*, but in this, as in other matters, he is in no position to insist on his preferences.) Several of the musicians offered songs of praise to the images. Then Nand Kiśor came forward, wearing *cūṛidār pāyāmā* with ankle bells (*ghuñgharū*), a black cap, and a long yellow silk jacket (*bagalbandī*) that opened at the side and was fastened by cords. The upper garment which he regards as proper for his profession is the black *ackan*, but Nand Kiśor's had been stolen several years before, and he had not been able to replace it.

The kathak's performance was divided into two parts. The first consisted of fifteen minutes of pure dance (*nṛitya*) performed to instrumental music only. Mimetic elements occurred in the dance only in a few momentary pauses during which he would strike a well-known pose such as that of Kṛishṇa playing the flute or upholding Mount Govardhan. This period of dance was broken into sections by intervals in which the kathak would retreat to a corner of the floor, stand motionless for a few moments, and recite rhythmically in a low voice an apparently meaningless series of syllables called a *bol*. This is a regulative device which governs the timing of the steps in the following section of the dance. It is uttered aloud so that the drummer can learn the pattern of rhythm and tones that is being requested. The task of the drummer is extremely exacting, and there are few musicians who can discharge it satisfactorily. One of the bols used during the performing of the *nṛitya* on this occasion was:

tak dhilāṅg, tak dhilāṅg, jhidakit jhidakit jag jag,  
thum thum thāri thāri tharrak theī,  
tatāt tat tigadā dig dig theī,  
tigadā dig dig theī, tat theī, trān theī.

Asked to explain in detail the meanings conveyed by this bol, the kathak smiled and invited the author to study under him intensively for at least six months. For attempts to explain the technicalities of the dance the reader is referred to the works of La Meri, Popley, and Ambrose. After prescribing a rhythm in syllables like those above, the kathak would step forth to express it in bodily motion. The bare feet are kept close together; the steps are short and quick. The arms sometimes make quite abrupt and angular motions. The waist bends and twists but little. The beauty of the dance consists in the graceful pirouetting of the body and in the delicate manipulation of the hands. It is a pleasing arabesque of motion involving little or no pantomime.

Projesh Banerji and Nataraj Vashi say that the kathak dance is made shallow by its lack of any narrative or ideational content, and they criticize it for possessing a merely technical brilliance.<sup>8</sup> This criticism is well founded so long as one considers only the kathak's *nṛitya*, but it is not a fair judgement of his complete art.

Too little notice has been taken of the second part of the performance, the *gat*, which employs an entirely different technique and supplies the story element and the human meaning. La Meri has mentioned *gats*, which he noticed in the performance of a kathak-trained dancing-girl. In intervals of rest, he says, she presented 'in lokadharma, or natural movements and expressions', fragmentary pantomimes on such subjects as a peacock, a *gopī*, a woman drawing water from a well, or Kṛishṇa playing his flute.<sup>9</sup> The few writers who notice the *gat* at all do not indicate the elaborateness and sophistication of these narrations as they are performed by Nand Kiśor.

When the time came for the *gat* in the performance in the Temple of Ānandī Bāī, Nand Kiśor seated himself cross-legged on the floor. This part of the recital was therefore not a dance at all, properly speaking. Its substance was an extended song uttered in words and at the same time illustrated and explained by imitative and symbolic gestures that provided a visual commentary on the text, like the illuminations of a manuscript. On that February evening, in the Hindu month of *Phālgun*, the song rendered was a *Holī* song written by Bindā Dīn. In it the *gopīs* complain that Kṛishṇa has splashed them with colored water yet betray their secret love for him. On many nights of the year Nand Kiśor uses the seasonal songs contained in the temple's great book of hymns, which lay open on a low stand before the harmonium.<sup>10</sup> *Hindolā* (swinging songs) prevail during the rainy month of *Śrāvaṇ*, and during the month of *Bhādoṇ*, the month of the *Janmāshṭamī* celebration, songs of congratulation to Nand and Yaśodā upon the birth of Kṛishṇa are in order.

One day Nand Kiśor presented to the author the text of two of his songs, written out laboriously in his own hand. During the week that followed, he gave a word-by-word interpretation of each line and demonstrated each of the manual signs which he uses in his gestural commentary on the text. With his co-operation many of these signs were photographed. The kathak accepted the name *mudrā* for these gestures, but he himself was accustomed to call them *cihn*. He knew of no book or manual which served as authority for these *cihn* or for any other aspect of his art.

<sup>8</sup> Banerji, pp. 154 f.; Nataraj Vashi, pp. 50f.

<sup>9</sup> La Meri, *Indian Art and Letters*, N.S. 13 (1939), p. 18. See also Bowers, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Śrīpuṣṭīmārgiyā Pad Saṅgraha*, third part, *Varshotsava* (Bombay, Vaishṇava Thākurdās Sūrdās Sāh Gopāl Dās Govind Dās, saṃvat 1952 [A.D. 1895]).



The first song below is one which Nand Kiśor used during the Janmāshṭamī season. A felicitation of Kṛishṇa's foster parents, it praises Kṛishṇa by referring to his exploits and to some of his endearing qualities. It is sung in the mode known as *Kānhrā*. The second song bears the heading *Āsāvārī*, which is a specification of the musical mode in which it is to be sung. It expresses the admiration of the gopīs for Kṛishṇa as the Divine Dancer. As is indicated by the chāp or poet's signature embedded in the final lines of each, both are compositions of the supreme kathak of modern times, Bindā Dīn of Lucknow. We present now the *devanāgarī* texts of these songs as Nand Kiśor wrote them down.

### जन्म की बधाई

प्रगटे बृज नन्दलाल सकल गुण निधनियां  
 बंक भृकुटी चपल नयन कोटि कोटि वारूं मयन  
 देखत भई दासीं सब जगत मन मोहनियां  
 लीने है मात गोद बाल केलि करि विनोद  
 जीवहु तुम प्राण मेरे कंस के दहनियां  
 मुख चूमत हलरावत दुलराय पय पियावत  
 बोइ भुजा पकरि आली बल बाल बालि हनियां  
 घुंघरारी अलकैं मधु पंक सोहैं कमलन पै  
 लगे भाल कोने से मानो राहु सी ग्रसनियां  
 घुटुअन हरि धावैं गहि पाणि पग चलावैं  
 ब्रह्मादि सिव सराहैं यमुधा के भाग धनियां  
 सुर विमान छाये बरसत सुमन सुहाये  
 सनकादि वेद शेष आदि आये सब सरनियां  
 यह जगत कौ उधारौ तेहि हेत रूप धारौ  
 गिरिधर गुपाल बिन्दा के पाप के हरनियां

### आसावरी

नृतत आवत गति कुकुत थेई कुकुत थेई  
 आली री मन मोहनियां छवि  
 द्रुत विलम्बित देत ताल कर बदत आवत गति कुकुत थेई कुकुत थेई  
 अपि ते दुचन्द दुति आतुरता प्रबल गति कुकुत थेई कुकुत थेई  
 बिन्दा बिपुल गति उपजत अनन्त विधि  
 नितुम नितुम श्रुति बदति बरसत सुर सुमन

Now we shall explain how the kathak rendered these poems in the gesture language of his cihn. Each line is given first in English translation and then in romanized Hindī, and at every point where Nand Kiśor employed a cihn, a superscript letter is inserted after the appropriate word or phrase, in both the Hindī and the English versions. The gestures are then listed in alphabetical

order, together with the Hindī words which they gloss, and are described in detail. When a letter in the list bears an asterisk, the gesture which it marks has been photographed and can be seen in Plates III-A and B.

### Birth Felicitation

1. There was manifested<sup>a</sup> in Braj<sup>b</sup> the dear boy<sup>d</sup> of Nand,<sup>c</sup> a treasury of all good qualities,

*Pragaṭe<sup>a</sup> Brij<sup>b</sup> Nanda-<sup>c</sup> lāl<sup>d</sup> sakal guṇ nidhaniyāṇ*

a. *pragaṭe*. At the level of the shoulders, the hands are held out, palms down; suddenly they are turned up, raised, and spread. The head is turned upward, and the eyes are opened wide in an expression of surprise and amazement.

b. *Brij*. The right index finger, pointing upward, describes a small circle. The reference is to the circular pilgrimage-path of the *Braj parikramā*, by which Braj is bounded and defined.

c. *Nanda-*. The left hand strokes an imaginary beard; the right hand grasps the top of an imaginary staff. (These are the characteristic stage properties of Nand in *rāslīlā* performances.)

d. *lāl*. The arms are cupped in cradle-fashion as if rocking a beloved child (*lāl*).

2. Having curved brows<sup>a</sup> and agile eyes;<sup>b</sup> a *koṭi* of *koṭis*<sup>c</sup> of Cupids<sup>e</sup> would I sacrifice<sup>d</sup> (for him).

*baṅk bhṛikuṭī<sup>a</sup> capal nayan<sup>b</sup> koṭi koṭi<sup>c</sup> vārūṇ<sup>d</sup> mayan.<sup>e</sup>*

a. *baṅk bhṛikuṭī*. The right index finger traces the outline of the left eyebrow from right to left, then compares this brow metaphorically with a bow by tracing the full length of the left arm, which has been raised and slightly bent. The left hand now seems to grasp a bow, and the right hand pretends to draw arrows from a quiver and discharge them.

b.\* *capal nayan*. The first and second fingers of the right hand touch the eyelids. They are then thrust forward in rapid vibration to suggest the dancing motion of Kṛishṇa's eyes.

c. *koṭi koṭi*. The fingers of the upturned palms are held slightly apart, and the two hands are turned over several times. It is a reference to the repeated use of the fingers as tally keepers, and indicates that a very great number is meant (cf. gesture 20b).

d.\* *vārūṇ*. The cupped hands, with palms turned outward, are brought together about a foot before the face. Each is brought backward to its own temple and held there for a moment. Then the two together are thrust outward a foot or so. The right hand continues further in a motion of giving. (This is a common gesture in making any offering of a religious nature.)



e.\* *mayan*. Cupid (Kāmdev) is suggested by a reference to his bow. The left arm is bent into a bow as in gesture 2a. The right hand moves along its length in undulant motion to indicate that the bow is wreathed in flowers. The right hand then pauses inside the curve of the bow in a cupped position which is the sign for ‘flower’, and more specifically for ‘lotus’.

**3. Seeing<sup>a</sup> him, the enchanters of the hearts<sup>d</sup> of all the world<sup>c</sup> became his slave-girls.<sup>b</sup>**

*Dekhat<sup>a</sup> bhañ dāsīñ<sup>b</sup> sab jagat<sup>c</sup> man mohaniyāñ.<sup>d</sup>*

a.\* *Dekhat*. The index and middle fingers of the right hand, slightly spread, are pointed forward (cf. gesture 2b).

b.\* *bhañ dāsīñ*. The index fingers go through the motions of a woman’s lifting and throwing back the hood of her sāṛī. (Those who become dancing-women cease to veil themselves.)

c.\* *sab jagat*. The index finger describes a circle as in gesture 1b and then moves from right to left in front of the face with four pauses symbolic of the lines of division in the world of plurality. Meaning: ‘the Whole, and all things in it.’

d.\* *man mohaniyāñ*. Both hands are placed over the heart. The right arm is extended to its full length. It makes a grasping motion, and brings back a ‘captured heart’.

**4. Mother has taken<sup>a</sup> (him) in her lap;<sup>b</sup> with the child<sup>c</sup> she sports and frolics.<sup>d</sup>**

*Līne hai<sup>a</sup> māt god<sup>b</sup> bāl<sup>c</sup> keli kari vinod.<sup>d</sup>*

a. *Līne hai*. The outstretched hands, palms up, are brought inward to the waist.

b. *god*. The arms, cradled at the waist as if supporting a baby, are lowered a little to the lap.

c. *bāl*. The left hand is placed on the head of an imaginary child.

d. *keli kari vinod*. The kathak grins, snaps his fingers, chucks the baby’s chin, and holds both palms up before the baby in a gesture widely used while trying to placate or gratify another person.

**5. Live long,<sup>a</sup> my Life’s-breath,<sup>b</sup> Thou Destroyer of Kaṣ !<sup>c</sup>**

*Jīvahu tum<sup>a</sup> prāñ mere<sup>b</sup> Kaṣ ke dahaniyāñ !<sup>c</sup>*

a.\* *Jīvahu tum*. The right forearm is raised from the elbow at a 45-degree angle. The gesture is evidently vocative. Nand Kiśor could say nothing in explanation except that he followed Bindā Dīn’s tradition in the gesture.

b.\* *prāñ mere*. The hands are placed over the heart. In this gesture the symbols for *prāñ* and for *mere* happen to coincide.

c.\* *Kaṣ ke dahaniyāñ*. The two hands, moved right and left above the forehead, mark out a horizontal line: the high platform on which Kaṣ sat in the arena. Each hand now touches the crown of the head on its respective

side and moves outward and downward: Kaṣ wears long hair. The kathak's right hand catches hold of imaginary locks, and the left grasps this hair near the scalp. His hands tug inward toward his body: Kaṣ is being dragged down to the floor of the arena. Now the two hands become the contending wrestlers; the two palms, facing each other at a distance of about a foot, move up and down in feint and counterfeint. Finally, the right hand goes into complete ascendancy and the left is 'on its back' below. Both hands go downward with force: Kṛishṇa crushes Kaṣ.

**6. His face she kisses;<sup>a</sup> she rocks him,<sup>b</sup> and, fondling him,<sup>c</sup> she suckles him.<sup>d</sup>**

*Mukh cūmat<sup>a</sup> halarāvat<sup>b</sup> dularāy<sup>c</sup> pay piyāvat.<sup>d</sup>*

a. *Mukh cūmat*. The kathak lowers his head as if kissing a babe in arms.

b. *halarāvat*. The arms, held cradle-fashion, are rocked to right and left.

c.\* *dularāy*. The two arms press an imaginary baby to the left breast and shoulder.

d.\* *pay piyāvat*. The right index finger traces the perimeter of a left breast. The breast is lifted with the cupped palm of the right hand, and the right thumb is thrust out as a nipple.

**7. Catching hold<sup>b</sup> of those same<sup>a</sup> arms, O friend,<sup>c</sup> with a rope she ties the child securely.<sup>d 11</sup>**

*Boi<sup>a</sup> bhujā pakari<sup>b</sup> ālī<sup>c</sup> bal bāl bālī haniyāṇ.<sup>d</sup>*

a. *Boi*. The right index finger is held vertically at shoulder height. The gesture leads one to interpret *boi* as a demonstrative pronoun with the emphatic particle, 'those very arms (which crushed Kaṣ)'. The kathak understands it as equivalent to *doi*, 'both'. We think the gestural commentary to be more likely to have preserved the original meaning.

b. *pakari*. The right hand snatches the left wrist from above.

c. *ālī*. In a vocative gesture the head is turned sharply aside to the right and the flattened right hand is extended in that direction.

d. *bal bāl bālī haniyāṇ*. The two hands are rotated rapidly around each other as if tying something with many turns of cord; then the closed hands are pulled sharply apart as if tightening a knot.

**8. Curled are his locks,<sup>a</sup> beautiful as the black bee<sup>b</sup> upon the lotus.<sup>c</sup>**

*Ghuṇḡharārī alakaiṇ<sup>a</sup> madhu paṇk<sup>b</sup> sohain kamalan pai.<sup>c</sup>*

a. *Ghuṇḡharārī alakaiṇ*. The right index finger traces a number of small circles at the side of the head: Kṛishṇa's curls.

<sup>11</sup> Line 7 seems corrupt. The translation given represents Nand Kiśor's understanding of its meaning, with the exception of the interpretation of *boi*, as mentioned. For the mythological reference, see below, p. 166, No. 6, the *Ukhalbandhan Līlā*. Another possible translation, referring to the same myth, is 'O friend, she catches firm hold of those same arms—of the child who was the slayer of Bālī!'

b.\* *madhu paṅk*. A hovering bee is represented by the trembling fingers of the right hand, which descends from right to left. The cupped left hand represents the lotus.

c.\* *kamalan pai*. As the hand representing the bee approaches the 'lotus', the right hand transforms itself into a symbol meaning 'in' or 'on': From a closed fist the index finger and thumb are extended together. The small end of the fist is turned down; the thumb rests on the palm side of the index finger at the first joint.

**9. (The curls) encroach upon the forehead from the temples<sup>a</sup> like Rāhu the Devourer.<sup>b</sup>**

*Lage bhāl kone se<sup>a</sup> māno Rāhu sī grasaniyāṇ.<sup>b</sup>*

a. *Lage bhāl kone se*. A sweep of the hand from left temple to right indicates where Kṛishṇa's locks meet the forehead.

b.\*\* *Rāhu sī grasaniyāṇ*. First, an introductory sign called *caṇḍramā* indicates that the moon is being referred to: The hands, palms in, are held before the face. They point upward toward each other at a 45-degree angle, the fingertips touching. Now the hands dip downward and outward in a crescent motion until they part, and the thumbs are raised up almost vertically.

Second, the left hand alone now represents the moon: The knuckles flex until the crescent moon is unmistakable. The right hand becomes the maw of the demon Rāhu: The right thumb becomes the demon's lower jaw; the fingers become his upper jaw and snout. The devouring 'Rāhu' now moves left, approaching the 'moon'.

**10. Hari runs along on his knees.<sup>a</sup> Catching his hands,<sup>b</sup> she makes him go on his feet.<sup>c</sup>**

*Ghuṭuan Hari dhāvaiṇ<sup>a</sup> gahi pāṇi<sup>b</sup> pag calāvaiṇ.<sup>c</sup>*

a. *Ghuṭuan*. The upturned palms, placed before the chest one in front of the other, represent the creeping child's knees. The inner hand crosses the outer again and again to suggest baby Kṛishṇa's rapid movement.

b. *gahi pāṇi*. The right hand (Yasodā's) grasps the fingers of the left, which represent baby Kṛishṇa's hands.

c.\* *pag calāvaiṇ*. The two outstretched hands grasp the hands of an imaginary child. They guide the toddler inward, with pauses marking the child's hesitant steps.

**11. Śiva,<sup>b</sup> Brahmā<sup>a</sup> and others applaud Yaśodā's rich<sup>d</sup> fortune.<sup>c</sup>**

*Brahmādi<sup>a</sup> Siv<sup>b</sup> sarāhaiṇ Yasudhā ke bhāg<sup>c</sup> dhaniyāṇ.<sup>d</sup>*

a. *Brahmādi*. To suggest the four faces of Brahmā, the hands are placed at their respective temples. Each hand moves out laterally in a double movement, broken by a stop.



b.\* *Siv*. The right hand indicates Śiva's crescent by making a dipping motion across the forehead from left to right. Now the left hand, by sweeping downward and outward from the scalp until the arm is fully extended, suggests the descent of the Ganges from Śiva's hair.

c. *Yasudhā ke bhāg*. The right hand taps the forehead several times (because one's fortune is written there before one's birth).

d. *dhaniyāṇ*. The outstretched arms are raised upward; the eyes are raised and opened wide in surprise (at such a vast good fortune).

**12. The celestial cars of the gods<sup>a</sup> overcast (the earth). Beautiful flowers rain down.<sup>b</sup>**

*Sur vimān<sup>a</sup> chāye, barsat suman suhāye.<sup>b</sup>*

a. *Sur vimān*. The right hand, outspread above the head with palm turned down, moves from right to left—an aerial chariot! The left hand then makes a like motion, suggesting a plurality of chariots.

b.\* *barsat suman suhāye*. The right hand first makes the flower-sign (see 2e). Then, becoming a plucking hand, it grasps at an imaginary flower and tosses it down: The celestial beings are picking and throwing down the flowers of heaven. The fluttering fall of the blossoms is now represented: The index fingers, held high, are brought down in parallel wavering courses.

**13. Sanaka and others,<sup>a</sup> the Veda,<sup>b</sup> Śesha and others,<sup>c</sup> all took refuge with their Protector.<sup>d</sup>**

*Sanakādi<sup>a</sup> Ved<sup>b</sup> Śesh ādi<sup>c</sup> āye sab saraniyāṇ.<sup>d</sup>*

a.\* *Sanakādi*. The kathak's hand rests upon the head of an imaginary child of short stature. (Sanaka is one of a group of mind-born sons of Brahmā who remain five years old forever.)

b.\* *Ved*. The palms, joined together a foot before the face, are opened like the leaves of a book (the modern type of *bound* book, we note). The head makes the horizontal motions of scanning the lines.

c.\* *Śesh ādi*. The left hand and forearm now become a serpent. The forearm is raised to 45-degrees, the fingers seem to form a serpent's hood, and the thumb nail represents its eye. However, the kathak says the digits represent the thousand heads of Ādiśesha, the serpent on which Viṣṇu reclines.

d. *āye sab saraniyāṇ*. The kathak bows his head, crosses his forearms, and stoops slightly as if to touch some revered person's feet.

**14. This world<sup>a</sup> save<sup>b</sup> Thou; for that purpose didst Thou assume material form.<sup>c</sup>**

*Yah jagat<sup>a</sup> kau udhārau<sup>b</sup> tehi het rūp dhārau.<sup>c</sup>*

a. *Yah jagat*. The right index finger describes a circular motion as in 3c.

b. *udhārau*. The upturned palms, starting from the chest, make a lifting motion upward and outward.

c. *rūp dhārau*. The right hand moves downward vertically in front of the body with the index and thumb pressed together and the other fingers fluttering loosely. The fluttering fingers, the kathak says, represent all the *aṅgas* or members of the body.

**15. O Mountain-supporter,<sup>a</sup> O Cow-keeper,<sup>b</sup> O Remover of Bindā's sins!<sup>c</sup>**

*Giridhar<sup>a</sup> Gupāl<sup>b</sup> Bindā ke pāp ke haraniyāṇ.<sup>c</sup>*

a.\* *Giridhar*. Mount Govardhan is indicated by beginning at a point before the face and tracing, with a downward and outward motion of the two hands, the outline of the slopes of the mountain. Next we see the raising of that hill as the kathak puts the level right palm under it and raises it high. Next the left hand moves up to the imagined level of the base of the mountain and takes its weight upon the point of the extended little finger. Last, the right hand, relieved of the weight, is held upward with outward-facing palm in the position which, as a *mudrā*, is called *abhayahasta*. The kathak was not familiar with the Sanskrit term, but said the gesture meant 'Fear not!'

b. *Gupāl*. The right hand plucks an imaginary blade of grass and takes it to the mouth.<sup>12</sup> The two hands for a moment rest as if atop a herdsman's staff, and then adjust a blanket about the head and shoulders as herdsmen do.

c.\* *pāp ke haraniyāṇ*. The left hand holds up three fingers. They symbolize, says the kathak, the three categories of sin: *daiḥik*, *mānasik*, and *daivik*—corporeal sin, mental sin, and sin allotted because of the evil *karma* of previous births.<sup>13</sup> The right hand makes a motion of reaching, grasping, and taking these away.

<sup>12</sup> The kathak understands Bindā Dīn to have meant by this grass-eating gesture only that 'Kṛishṇa is a feeder of cows', i.e. Kṛishṇa is a provider for devotees. This figure is common coin. See W. Norman Brown, 'Early Vaishnava Miniature Paintings from Western India', *Eastern Art*, 2 (1930), 199 f., and pl. CXV. However, in a context involving such prominent mention of the devotee's sins, the gesture is more meaningful if interpreted also in the light of the ancient custom whereby the warrior when overwhelmed might claim his adversary's mercy by taking grass between his teeth, thus declaring himself a cow, submissive, and not to be killed. Thus the poet here implores the deity's indulgence for his sins by invoking the god as one who protects those who utterly surrender to him. See *The Cambridge History of India*, 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1922), 247, 270; Gautama's *Dharmaśāstra*, X.18, *Sacred Books of the East*, 2, 226; Richard Pischel, 'Ins Gras beissen', *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 23 (Apr. 30, 1908), 445-64. Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (2nd ed., rev. and enlarged. Calcutta, Association Press; London, Oxford University Press, 1921), pl. VIII and pp. 50 f.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *tridhā tāpam ca pāpam*, Śaṅkara's 'Śataśloki', śloka 2, in *Select Works of Sankaracharya* (Madras, Natesan & Co., n.d.), p. 85.



*Āsāvarī*<sup>14</sup>**16. He comes<sup>b</sup> dancing<sup>a</sup> the step, ku-ku-ta the-ī, ku-ku-ta the-ī.<sup>15</sup>***Nṛitat<sup>a</sup> āvat<sup>b</sup> gati, kukuta theī, kukuta theī.*

a. *Nṛitat*. As in gesture 10a the hands, palm up, are moved outward from the chest by rotating them one over the other—this time to represent the rapidly moving feet of the dancer.

b. *āvat*. An extended hand is moved inward toward the body.

**17. O friend,<sup>a</sup> what heart-<sup>b</sup> captivating<sup>c</sup> beauty!<sup>d</sup>***Ālī rī<sup>a</sup> man<sup>b</sup> mohaniyāṇ<sup>c</sup> chavi.<sup>d</sup>*

a. *Ālī rī*. Vocative motion as in 7c. The hand used in calling then points in another direction, the direction of Kṛishṇa.

b. *man*. The right hand is placed on the heart.

c. *mohaniyāṇ*. The right hand is extended and becomes itself a symbol of the heart. The left hand seizes this heart and draws it away.

d. *chavi*. With a vertical sweep of the hand the kathak points to the entire range of the stature of the imagined Kṛishṇa, i.e. he is beautiful from tip to toe !

**18. The time,<sup>c</sup> swift<sup>a</sup> or slow,<sup>b</sup> he gives with the hands. While coming<sup>e</sup> he calls out<sup>d</sup> the step, ku-ku-ta the-ī, ku-ku-ta the-ī.***Drut<sup>a</sup> vilambit<sup>b</sup> deta tāl<sup>c</sup> kar, badat<sup>d</sup> āvat<sup>e</sup> gati, kukuta theī, kukuta theī.*

a. *Drut*. Clapping his hands together, the kathak beats a rapid time.

b.\* *vilambit*. A closed fist is held up, thumb out. This signifies a retarded time, says Nand Kiśor.

c. *deta tāl*. One palm is beaten with the fingers of the other hand, as in 18a.

d.\* *badat*. The right hand touches the lips, then moves outward and up.

e. *āvat*. Identical with 16b.

**19. His radiance<sup>c</sup> is twice<sup>b</sup> that of lightning;<sup>a</sup> very restless<sup>d</sup> is the step, ku-ku-ta the-ī, ku-ku-ta the-ī.***Api te<sup>a</sup> ducand<sup>b</sup> duti<sup>c</sup> āturtā prabal<sup>d</sup> gati, kukuta theī, kukuta theī.*

a.\* *Api te*. The fluttering hands move in arches above the head, in imitation of the tracery of lightning across the sky.

b. *ducand*. Two fingers of the right hand are held up and gently fluttered.

c. *duti*. The right hand is extended palm down, with the fingers stretched well apart. The hand is moved up and down to suggest beams of radiant light.

d. *āturtā prabal*. Soft but very rapid clapping of the hands.

<sup>14</sup> *Āsāvarī* is a musical mode, a *rāginī* attached to the *bhairav rāg*. It is considered appropriate for the morning hours from seven to nine o'clock.

<sup>15</sup> In *ku-ku-ta the-ī* we have another example of a bol for the regulation of the steps of a dance.

20. **Bindā** says,<sup>a</sup> **he creates many steps in endless<sup>b</sup> ways.**

*Bindā<sup>a</sup> bipul gati upajat anant<sup>b</sup> vidhi.*

a. *Bindā.* The right hand is raised to the side of the face. The head is turned toward the right.

b.\* *anant.* The hands make the motions of counting on the fingers in the Indian manner; that is, the thumb counts the tip, first knuckle, and second knuckle of each of the four fingers. An upward movement of hands and eyes then suggests that the total is beyond reckoning.

21. **‘Thou art endless, Thou art endless,’<sup>a, 16</sup> the revealed scriptures<sup>b</sup> say.<sup>c</sup> The flowers<sup>f</sup> of the gods<sup>e</sup> rain down.<sup>d</sup>**

*Nitum, nitum<sup>a</sup> śruti<sup>b</sup> badati<sup>c</sup> barsat<sup>d</sup> sur<sup>e</sup> suman.<sup>f</sup>*

a.\* *Nitum.* The eyes look skyward. The right hand is extended upward almost to full length.

b. *śruti.* The same gesture is used as for *ved*, 13b.

c. *badati.* Gesture identical with 18d.

d. *barsat.* The two index fingers trace the wavering downward path of falling flowers, as in 12b.

e. *sur.* The right hand points upward to the sky, the abode of the divine beings.

f. *suman.* The fingers of the upturned palm cup themselves into the flower sign, as in gestures 2e, 8b, and 12b.

The gestures described above are far more intelligible than one might imagine to the Vaishṇava of modern Braj. In reproducing the signs before his friends in Vṛindāban the author found that people of some literary education, once they had been told the general type of material that was being

<sup>16</sup> Acquaintance with *nitum* is denied by all available authorities on the Hindī language, living or dead. For its interpretation we rely entirely, therefore, on the kathak himself. Nand Kiśor’s explanation is unhesitating: The components of *nitum* are *na iti tum, iti* meaning ‘end’, and *tum* being a personal pronoun of the second person; hence, ‘Thou art endless’. By any code the *samdhī* is lawless, but it is a *fait accompli*. For purposes of translation we accept *nitum* as meaning what its user (and possibly its creator) says it means.

A more fundamental puzzle is the problem of where the scriptures say *nitum, nitum*, or anything like it, and what the words originally meant. *Nitum* is as strange to Sanskrit as to Hindī. It may be a corruption of *nityam*, in which case the scriptural occurrences are legion, and the kathak would have preserved the original meaning even while corrupting the word. However, the unusual doubling of the term strongly suggests a specific source: The *Chāndogya Upanishad*’s recurrent ‘... *neti neti* ...’, asserting the impossibility of identifying the Absolute with anything phenomenal. These authoritative words have caused Vaishṇava theologians some difficulty. They have often discussed them in order to offer sectarian explanations. In Nābhājī, *Bhaktamāl* (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvar Press, saṃvat 1988 [A.D. 1931]), p. 266, we find ‘*tāson kahat darat ved kahe neti net hai*’, and Tulsīdās, *Rāmcarit-mānas*, p. 832, writes, ‘*Muni tehi dhyān na pāvahiṇ neti neti ved, Kṛpāsindhu soi kapinh san karat anek binod.*’ Nand Kiśor or one of his predecessors has evidently misunderstood and garbled this famous phrase.

illustrated, could usually identify the action represented or the deity to which a gesture referred. Of course, a majority of the cihn are not very difficult either to create or to understand. Many gestures which represent deeds or happenings are simple and direct imitations of the actions. Some of the representations of objects, such as the flower sign seen in 8b and elsewhere, can be recognized immediately even by an outsider. A large group of gestures, however, cannot be understood without a detailed knowledge of the general literary and cultural background. Many cihn indicate the thing meant by subtle gestural references that are, in effect, epithet or synecdoche—for instance, the symbols for Nand, Kāmdev, Rāhu, Brahmā, Śiv, Sanak, and lightning in gestures 1c, 2e, 9b, 11a, 13a, and 19a. And some gestures are quite artificial conventions which are not intelligible to anybody who has not had specific initiation. An example is the symbol for 'in' or 'on' in 8c. Some of the kathak's signs the author knows to be a part of the larger tradition of the symbolic gestures of the Indian dance, but he leaves comparison with the mudrās of other ancient and modern schools to those who can do justice to the subject.<sup>17</sup> The performance of a kathak, though it is not very intricate, presupposes in the spectator a certain background and training. It demands effort of the average modern Indian who wishes to understand and appreciate it.

How prominent is the place of kathaks in traditional Hindu society? How numerous are they, and over how large an area are they found? Despite census reports regarding large communities of them, inquiries made in Mathurā, Lucknow, and Banāras indicated that there are very few practising kathaks in Uttar Pradesh. In Farukhābād at Madār Gate there still lived at last report Nand Kiśor's teacher Bābū Rām, over eighty years old but still dancing. With him is his son and student Lārli Lāl. The family of Bindā Dīn was long represented in Lucknow by his nephew Mahārāj Śambhū Nāth Miśra, who danced and taught his student Rāmeś Kumār at his house on Bhaironji Road in Golāgañj Mohalla. Lately he has joined the staff of Bhāratīya Kalā Kendra in New Delhi, where the prominent kathak Sundar Prasād works also. Mohanrao Kalyānpurkar continues in Lucknow. Śambhū's brother Lacchū still considers Lucknow his home, but for twenty years he has been living in Bombay, where he heads a party of a half dozen disciples and associates. Sudarśan Kumār teaches kathak dancing in a Bombay music school. In Kabīr Chaurā Mohalla in Banāras is the house of the veteran kathak, Sukhdev Prasād Miśra, who is famous under the name Sukhdeo Ustād. His daughter Alaknandā dances privately in Banāras, and another daughter,

<sup>17</sup> Mr. V. Raghavan in 'Kathakali and Bharatanatya', *Triveni*, 6, No. 2 (Sept.-Oct. 1933), 165, says, 'The "kathaka" of the North is our South Indian "katha kalakshepa", with much dance (nrīta) and with a little "abhinaya".' The present publication may enable a person well-acquainted with katha kalakshepa to make a detailed comparison.



Sitārā Devī, acts and dances in the films. Sukhdeo Ustād himself usually now lives in Calcutta, where he trained his protégé, Naṭrāj Gopī Kṛishṇa. His son Rām Dās is under instruction for the profession also. Rajasthan has two famous kathaks named Mohan Lāl and Sohan Lāl. They make their home in Jaypur, a center of kathak dancing not derived from Lucknow. Rādhelāl Miśra, pupil of one Jailāl, teaches the kathak dance in the troupe of the famous Rām Gopāl. No doubt there are other names, neither mentioned in literature nor known to Nand Kiśor, which could be added. But if the true list were ten times as long, the kathaks could not even then be looked upon as having any great popular influence. The kathak has had a place in the life of the upper classes in the past and is significant in the development of Indian art today, but quantitatively speaking, his share in the molding of the popular mind is small.

The extinction of the kathak is not an immediate danger, but the ultimate price of survival will be a drastic and perilous adaptation to the tastes of a new class of patrons. Some kathaks are trying to appeal to the interests of new circles of wealthy and culture-conscious people in the large cities. A journalist's review of a performance by Lacchū Mahārāj's company at Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavan in Bombay describes not only items on traditional Kṛishṇaite themes, which were praised by the reviewer, but other efforts to catch the public eye by dealing with current social and political topics. There was a peasant's dance, a treatment of the life of Mahātmā Gāndhī, a *devadāsī* number, an item on a prohibition theme depicting a day in the life of a drunkard. These innovations, in the judgement of the reviewer, were executed in a vapid and objectionable style.<sup>18</sup> The kathaks may be able to solve the problem of their bread and butter, but in doing so, they may surrender their function as teachers of religion or lose their artistic identity.

No one has ever written a critical history of the kathaks or even compiled the information from which a history might be refined. The earliest notice of these dancers in Western literature seems to have been written only a century and a half ago.<sup>19</sup> In gathering information about the eighteenth century and earlier times, we do not even have the aid of an organized local legend.

The fame of Lucknow as a center of kathak dancing has caused many writers to speak of Lucknow as its birthplace, as if this were a self-evident fact. If we suppose Lucknow to have been such a center before the last century, we do so without the support of any evidence. Known patronage by the nawabs of Oudh goes back only a little over a hundred years, and available

<sup>18</sup> Martin Russell, 'Kathak on the Stage', *Thought* (Delhi, June 23, 1950), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Duer Broughton, *The Costume, Character, Manners, and Religious Ceremonies of the Mahrattas* (London, J. Murray, 1813), p. 94.

traditions on the origin of Bindā Dīn's professional line trace it to an eighteenth-century beginning in eastern Uttar Pradesh. Śambhū Mahārāj says that the first kathak of the family was Bindā Dīn's great-grandfather who lived in Haṛiyā in Allahabad District. It was Bindā's grandfather Prakāśjī who moved from Haṛiyā to Lucknow. We hear of royal patronage beginning only with Bindā's father, Ṭhākur Prasād, who was favored by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who ruled from 1847 to 1856. Even if we suppose that official encouragement began with Prakāśjī, we have no assurance that the importance of Lucknow antedates the nineteenth century. And the same tradition which tells us of Prakāśjī's move to Lucknow tells us that there was an older center. As we shall see shortly, there is some literary evidence that Haṛiyā was the residence of kathaks before A.D. 1712.

Nand Kiśor, too, provided the author with a pīṛhī of the line of teachers who preceded Bindā Dīn.<sup>20</sup> Disagreeing on the names and history of the earlier generations, it confirms the recency of the connection with Lucknow, and it supports Śambhū Mahārāj at least in finding the origin of the line far to the east. Regarding the firm rooting of the tradition in the eastern districts at the beginning of the last century, we have the evidence of the census figures mentioned earlier in the chapter. Also, James Prinsep's 1825 census of Banāras (see p. 33 n.) discloses that there were more than a hundred of kathak caste in that city at that time. F. Buchanan's survey of Bihar during the years 1807-14 reports fifty-eight kathak establishments in the principal towns of the area.<sup>21</sup> At about the same time, Thomas Duer Broughton described the visit of a troupe of kathaks to Scindia's camp in Rajasthan.<sup>22</sup> In short, the kathak profession was mature, and its representatives were widely distributed in North India before Bindā Dīn was born and before Lucknow became famous for its art.

There are several legends about the history of the kathaks during the period of Muslim dominance, and a few facts indicate that they may have some substance. William Crooke passes on to us a tradition about the beginning of contact between the kathaks and their Muslim overlords:<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bindā Dīn's pīṛhī, as taught to Nand Kiśor by Bābū Rām's father Mohan, a kathak who came to Farukhabad from Lucknow, is as follows: 1. Viśvanāth, 2. Bhūdhar, 3. Bālādīn, 4. Jagannāth, 5. Lekhrām, 6. Prakāśjī, 7. Bindā Dīn. Though the information supplied by Bindā Dīn's own nephew is no doubt more credible, before thinking this list to be without substance, we must consider that many a kathak apprentices his sons not to himself but to another kathak famed in the profession and that the boy's succession may be traced either through his father or through his tutor. Nand Kiśor says that the original home of the line was in the Kabīr Chaurā Mohalla in Banāras, where descendants of Viśvanāth live to this day, and that it was Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who induced Bālādīn to move to Lucknow. There is error in the identification of the nawāb, or of the kathak whom he invited, because Bindā Dīn was already a young man in the days of Wajid Ali Shah.

<sup>21</sup> Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, I, Appendix of statistical tables, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> See Broughton, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> Crooke, p. 173.



According to one story they are really Gaur Brahmans, who used originally to sing and dance in the temples of the gods, and a certain Muhammadan Emperor of Delhi once heard them and was so pleased with their skill that he ordered them in future to perform in public.

Even if we could check and guarantee Crooke's statement, the information we would have would not be much. But it affirms a historical confrontation that, on other grounds, we must acknowledge to have taken place. Kathaks and their Muslim rulers did indeed meet, and they had intimate dealings with each other. Essentially Hindu, the kathak shows accommodations to Islamic culture that cannot have begun only so recently as the time of Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow. We have in mind such accommodations as the common title of *ustād* and the Muslim articles of dress which are often regarded as standard costume for the performers. William Crooke tells us also that he found meat eating common among the kathak caste, and also the worship of Ghāzī Miyān, a Muslim saint, whose cult has been prominent in Banāras.<sup>24</sup>

Priyā Dās in his commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* of Nābhājī tells the story of a Hindu dancer's first contact with Muslim authority.<sup>25</sup> It has a plausible ring and may well be relevant here. Writing about A.D. 1712, he tells of the predicament of a dancer (*nṛitak*) named Nārāyaṇ Dās. (We can reasonably suppose, with the modern subcommentator on our text, that he was a kathak.) Nārāyaṇ Dās was a strict devotee who would dance only before an image of Hari. The Muslim ruler of Harīyā Sarāy (we note that this is the place from which Bindā's line is said to have sprung) heard of Nārāyaṇ Dās and commanded him to perform a dance in his presence. Loyalty to his principle promised to bring Nārāyaṇ Dās serious consequences: It did not seem expedient to bring an idol before a violently idol-hating *mīr*. After much reflection he hit upon a solution: When dancing before the *mīr*, he put up before him in place of an image an inoffensive *tulsī* garland, a satisfactory idol substitute because the *tulsī* is regarded as not different from the Lord!

What the specific Muslim influences are, we have little ground for saying, but if any part of the kathak's performance had its origin beyond the Khyber Pass, it is not likely to be the dramatic portion detailed in this chapter but the *nṛitya* or dance, which exhibits the Islamic fascination with geometric form rather than the rich anthropomorphism of the ancient Hindu dance. Writers have offered confident statements on the development of kathak dance during the Mughal period, but they have no solid worth because they lack documentation in the records of the time. That history may be recoverable.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 174; Rev. M. A. Sherring, *The Sacred City of the Hindus* (London, Truebner & Co., 1868), p. 215.

<sup>25</sup> Sītārām Śaraṇ Bhagavān Prasād, *Śrī Bhaktamāl* (6 parts. Banāras, Baldev Nārāyaṇ Sinh, 1903-09), pp. 1178-80; Pratāp Sinh, *Bhakta Kalpadrum* (Lucknow, Naval Kiśor Press, A.D. 1870), p. 469. On the date of Priyā Dās see Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī-sāhitya kā Itihās*, p. 147.

A careful study of Mughal painting should be fruitful. But so far, serious investigation of the kathaks of that era has not begun.

Can one pass over these Muslim centuries and find the kathak's predecessors in the more abundant ancient Hindu records and monuments? A search through the best-known manuals of the classical Sanskrit literature is at once apparently successful. Several well-known writers agree that there is a sculptured representation of a performance of kathaks among the reliefs of the pre-Christian period at Sanchi. In *Le Théâtre indien*, Sylvain Lévi describes the methods of the modern kathaks, and then in order to show that their type of dramatic recitation is ancient, he introduces as evidence the sculptures of the Sanchi gateway:<sup>26</sup>

The *kathakas* sing the poem before a full hall and a mixed audience; they accompany their utterance with elegant gestures. Some dances and musical interludes fill in the intervals between the recitations. A Sanchi bas-relief of before the Christian era (reproduced in Mr. E. Schlagintweit, *Indien in Wort und Bild*, I, 176) represents a performance of *kathakas*. The reciters hold musical instruments in their hands, dance some steps and strike certain poses. The epic recitations thus executed border upon dramatic spectacle. While the declaimed poetry acts upon the imagination by way of the ears, the dance, the song, and the gestures address themselves to the eyes and strengthen the impression of the whole.

A. B. Keith in *The Sanskrit Drama* also cites Schlagintweit for the same purpose, thus giving these supposed kathakas of Sanchi additional prominence.<sup>27</sup>

Now, Schlagintweit does include, on the page cited by Lévi and Keith, a full-page lithograph with the title 'Kathak-Tänzer', but the pages of his text which interpret the lithograph do not say that it reproduces any ancient sculptured relief but indicate that the plate is a modern artist's representation of a contemporary kathak.<sup>28</sup> Schlagintweit does refer in this passage to an indistinct photograph of a sculptured panel at Sanchi which is said to represent a female entertainer dancing before a king; but Schlagintweit calls her merely 'Die Schauspielerin'. He does not claim to identify her as a kathaka.<sup>29</sup> Checking his interpretation in the Archaeological Survey of India's authoritative work, *The Monuments of Sanchi*, we find the panel identified there merely as a family scene at court with the usual musicians and a female dancer.<sup>30</sup> In short, no ancient kathakas are pictured in the monuments of Sanchi. The belief that they are rests upon a pyramid of errors.

<sup>26</sup> Sylvain Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien*, p. 309.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 30: 'Fortunately we have in a bas-relief from Sanchi, which may safely be placed before the Christian era, a representation of a group of these Kathakas.' Repeated in substance in Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1947), p. 635.

<sup>28</sup> Emil Schlagintweit, *Indien in Wort und Bild* (2 vols. Leipzig, Heinrich Schmidt & Carl Grünther, 1880), 2, 12: 'The modern representatives of the ancient Indian court actor are the kathaks . . . Their discourse takes the shape of an artistic declamation supported by gesticulations. Song and dignified graceful dance fill the pauses. Our picture, "The Kathak Dancer" (Vol. I, p. 176), presents such an interlude.'

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Sir John Marshall and Alfred Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī* (Archaeological Survey of India, n.p., n.d.), 1, 245, and 3, pl. 103e.

The word kathaka is, however, found in ancient literature. An examination of several readily available references is sufficient to establish that there is a continuity of some sort between the modern kathak and a kathaka profession of the distant past.

There is mention of a kathaka, for instance, in the eleventh-century *Kathā-saritsāgara*. We read that King Sahasrānika's long evening is whiled away listening to a long tale, a secular love story, told by the kathaka Saṅgataka.<sup>31</sup> The reader is given no hint regarding the kathaka's technique in narration.

References in the *Mahābhārata*, however, include information which establishes identifying ties with the kathak tradition of our day. A passage in the *Anuśāsanika Parva* indicates that the kathakas' caste was brahman and makes clear their relative social status within that caste. In an enumeration of the various kinds of brahmans who for one reason or another are disqualified from attending *śrāddhas* and receiving gifts, those suffering from certain diseases of body and mind are listed first, then the brahmans who have become physicians and liquor dealers, and then, we are told, 'Singers, dancers, rope-dancers, instrumentalists, kathakas, and fighters are not worthy of an invitation, O king.'<sup>32</sup> Then, as now, the kathaka was recognized as a brahman but as one of the least of brahmans. His right to the full privileges of brahmanhood was compromised by his following a profession which the arbiters of society regarded as somewhat unworthy of a brahman.

In a passage in the *Arjunavanavāsa* section of the *Ādiparva* we are told indirectly the type of profession which the ancient kathakas practised. We read there of Arjuna's departure for the forest accompanied by an entourage of men having many kinds of religious learning and skill. The group includes brahmans who know the Vedas and Vedāṅgas, men who contemplate the Supreme Spirit, and devotees, *sūtas*, and *paurāṇikas*, and, further, 'kathakas and forest-dwelling ascetics, and brahmans who recite sweetly the divine tales. Surrounded by these and many other followers of smooth speech (*ślakṣhṇa-kathaiḥ*), the Son of Pāṇḍu went forth like Indra surrounded by the Maruts'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Somadeva Bhaṭṭa, *Katha Sarit Sagara*, ed. and trans. Hermann Brockhaus (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1839), X.2, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> Vishnu S. Sukthankar, ed., *The Mahābhārata*, 17, part 1 (Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1966), 13.24.16, p. 180:

gāyanā nartakāś cai 'va vādakās tathā  
kathakā yodhakāś cai 'va rājan nā 'rhanti ketanam.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1 (1933), 1.206.2-4, p. 810 :

vedavedāṅgavidvāṁsastathaivādhyātmacintakāḥ  
caukshāśca bhagavadbhaktāḥ sūtāḥ paurāṇikāśca ye  
kathakāścāpare rājan śramanāśca vanaukasah  
divyākhyānāni ye cāpi paṭhanti madhuraṁ divjāḥ  
etaiś cā 'nyaiś ca bahubhiḥ sahāyaiḥ pāṇḍunandanah  
vṛtaḥ ślakṣhṇakathaiḥ prāyān marudbhīr iva vāsavaḥ.



Of the kathakas separately, nothing is predicated here; our information is derived from the type of list in which the epicist has included them. What is common to this retinue of Arjuna's? The group has a homogeneity even though the most prevalent characteristics are not obvious in absolutely every case. They are men of religion; they are men well-versed in the sacred lore, whether Vedas, Vedāṅgas, epics, purāṇas, or sacred tales. And—most important with regard to their occupation—they are *smooth-spoken* men. It is to be supposed that their skill in articulation was not a merely private talent but rather a professional characteristic and that the kathakas therefore belonged somewhere within a broad class of men whose work was the oral mediation of the sacred traditions.

The tenth-century commentator Kaiyaṭa refers to kathakas in a context which gives more direct information on their vocational activities. In commenting on Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, III.1.26, he equates kathaka and *granthika*, '*granthikeshv iti kathakeshv ity arthaḥ*'.<sup>34</sup> Now, regarding the famous passage which Kaiyaṭa had before him, some scholars affirm and others deny that it implies that the *granthikas*, by taking up parts in the reciting of their legends, added an element of drama to their art of declamation. The question does not concern us here. There is agreement, at least, that the *granthikas* mentioned by Patañjali were rhapsodists whose medium of expression was verbal (*śabda-*), and that it was by means of the uttered word that they brought vividly before the imagination of their audience the legendary deeds of Kṛiṣṇa, Kaṃsa, and Bali, 'reciting their fortunes from birth to death': '*teshām utpattiprabhṛityāvināśād ṛiddhīr vyācakshānāḥ . . .*'<sup>35</sup> If it is clear to modern scholars that the *granthikas* of this passage were reciters of sacred Vaishṇava myth, it must have been equally clear to Kaiyaṭa. Hence, when Kaiyaṭa says that the *granthikas* are kathakas, we may know that the kathakas of the tenth century A.D. followed a profession that was at least closely similar to that of these Vaishṇava reciters and thus comparable to the kathaks' function in the present day.

These spare references point to an ancient artist who shares with the modern kathak a common name, a common social status, and a common role in the transmission of Vaishṇava lore. We dare assume that we have here, not a mere survival of a name, but the living continuity of a professional class. The contemporary kathak's line of teachers extends backward beyond the Muslim period into ancient times.

<sup>34</sup> Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* with Kaiyaṭa's *Bhāṣyapradīpa* (London, India Museum, 1874), p. 927.

<sup>35</sup> Patañjali, *The Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya*, ed. F. Kielhorn (2nd rev. ed. Bombay, Government Central Book Depot, 1892-1906), 2, part 2, p. 36.



But do the detailed techniques of the kathak have ancient origins? Some of his gesture language is new (see *cihn* 13b and 21b); and so is the costume he usually wears today. But we must be silent on the age and origin of most aspects of his performance because we do not know what the techniques of the kathakas of the classical age were. Until we know in detail how they embellished their recitation long ago, we can only say that the kathak's profession is old. How much of his technique is old, we cannot say.





## THE BHAKTAMĀL NĀṬAK MAṆḌALĪ

At the edge of Vṛindāban lies a remarkable institution called, after its founder and first abbot, Uṛiyā Bābā's Āśram. A number of *sādhus* reside there under the spiritual direction of Hari Bābā, the present leader. The abbot is relieved of concern for the finances of the institution and for the food and lodging of the inmates by one of the monks who serves as administrative superintendent. The āśram is supported by the contributions of the wealthy merchants and government officials who have accepted its religious guidance. The founder laid down a policy, which is still followed, of not aligning the āśram strictly with any one of the four established sects and a cordial and catholic welcome is extended to all visitors who may come to the āśram gate. The abbot's interest in people of the non-monastic world is evident in his generous patronage of all available arts for the religious edification of laymen. On the footpaths of southwestern Vṛindāban at eight o'clock in the morning one always meets files of people of all ranks of secular life who are making their way toward Uṛiyā Bābā's Āśram because it is well known that anyone may go there on any day with the certainty of hearing some sort of entertaining religious instruction or instructive religious entertainment.

The public meetings take place within the āśram compound in the central room of an airy hall. The stage for the programs is nothing more than a rectangle of white cloth spread upon the center of the floor in the front of this room. The audience seats itself to the left, right, and rear of this reserved space. By unwritten law the mat-covered floor to the right of this stage is the preserve of women and children. Only two pieces of stage furniture are used: a movable plank bed and a wicker sofa which can be mounted upon it. The plank bed is sometimes used as a lecturer's or reader's platform. Appearing in a drama in its function as a simple bed, it lets the audience know that the scene is an ordinary domestic room. When the sofa is placed upon it and both

are draped with bright cloths, it is a high throne and the scene is to be recognized as the court of a king or a deity. These pieces of furniture are always placed at the extreme rear of the playing-space. In front of them runs a high wire on which a light hand-pulled curtain is strung. With no more physical equipment than the bed, sofa, and curtain, the actors who appear at Uṛiyā Bābā's Āśram are ready to represent any scene in heaven or on earth and to shift dexterously from one to the other. Neither actors nor audiences require any other aids than these, save imagination.

Sometimes the fare offered in this hall was plain and substantial—such as December's thirty-day reading (*pārāyaṇa*) of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Certain weeks were filled by programs of kīrttan and *bhajan* or by the lectures of a visiting kathāvācak. But, during at least three months of the six in which the author was a frequent visitor, the guests of the āśram were entertained by programs of drama. The performers were usually drawn from among Vṛindāban's own troupes of rāsdhārīs, but traveling actors from outside communities were sometimes engaged. A single troupe usually gave performances daily for a continuous period of two or three weeks and was paid about Rs. 15 per day for its services. In addition the actors were allowed to keep whatever offerings their audiences might drop into the āratī tray at the close of each day's presentation.

During the latter half of August 1949 the āśram offered its public a twelve-day series of performances by a group of players who called themselves the Bhaktamāl Nāṭak Maṇḍalī, 'The Troupe for Plays from the *Bhaktamāl*'. The author saw six of their productions. Their language and their techniques were geared to the common man's tastes and span of attention. The dialogue was in the standard national Hindī, the Khaṛī Bolī. The plays were therefore free from the difficulties of archaic and dialectical language that are found in most of the dramas of Braj. Absent also were the poetic intricacies of the rāslilā which perplex those who have not grown up in the Kṛishṇa cult. The speech was entirely in prose—an unrefined prose which sometimes offended the literary sensitivities of the author's highly educated companions. Music was not an organic part of the dramas, but the performers often introduced into them songs of a general devotional nature. Whenever one of the actor-devotees in the course of the play fell to singing a *bhajan* or a kīrttan, some member of the troupe always rose at the forward edge of the crowd and stirred congregational singing to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

All the dramas dealt with the lives of Vaishṇava saints who are at least mentioned in Nābhājī's *Bhaktamāl*. All were filled with the twentieth century's renewed appreciation of the progressive element in the Hindu revival of the sixteenth century. The hero of the play was often the outcaste and the nonconformist. The brahman often appeared in a bad light as the defender of



privilege and stupidity. Then as now, after a period of mere defense, the Hindu was ready to champion his religion openly in the face of the Muslim.

The first drama which the author attended told the story of Kāle Khān, a Muslim convert to Kṛishṇaism who countered the harassments of his Muslim neighbors with the supernatural power of devotional songs. When Kāle Khān's persecutors saw the efficacy of his prayer in restoring his dead son to life, they threw down their fezzes, tied up their hair into the sacred knot of the Hindus (coṭī), and joined in the worship of a lord who does such wonders for his devotees.

The next morning's play enacted the life of Nāmdev, the saint of Maharashtra. The opening scene is the throne room of a nawāb. The nawāb is being told about the fame of Nāmdev as a doer of miracles. The ruler calls Nāmdev in and demands a demonstration of his miraculous powers: 'Bring this dead cow back to life, or I shall kill you!' Nāmdev's bhajan is effective, the 'cow' (a child huddled under a sheet) rises, and the astonished ruler rewards Nāmdev with a golden tray. On the way home Nāmdev publicly throws the nawāb's gift into the river. The ruler hears of it and angrily calls him back to explain the whereabouts of his gift. From underneath his clothes Nāmdev pulls forth tray after tray, each the exact duplicate of the one given. Other episodes follow the *Bhaktamāl* story closely.<sup>1</sup>

On the third day the troupe presented the uproarious drama of Gātham Ḍākū, a robber of a distinguished criminal lineage. Not heeding his mother's warnings, he listened in on a few words of a sādhu's narration of the tale of Truthful Hariścandra and thereby ruined his professional career. For a time his moral reformation went only so far as to make him a scrupulously truthful robber, but in the end, a broader light dawned upon him and he became a full Vaishṇava.

The next day, the story enacted was that of Sadan Kasāī, a butcher. Converted to Vishṇuism, he set out in his enthusiasm to make a pilgrimage to Purī. In one of the houses where he received shelter for the night he was subjected to the treachery which the Biblical Joseph suffered from the wife of Potiphar. Sadan was falsely convicted before a judge, and in punishment his arms were cut off. But when the armless pilgrim arrived in Purī and went to worship in the temple of Jagannāth, his limbs were miraculously restored so that he might salute the image with folded hands.<sup>2</sup> In most of these dramas, farcical interludes were inserted between the loosely connected episodes of the main plot.

<sup>1</sup> For the basis in the *Bhaktamāl* of this and all other plays of this series, see Sītārām Śaraṇ Bhagavān Prasād, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, index of persons, pp. 1332 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The story of Sadan Kasāī is told also in Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (6 vols. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909), 6, 84-88; Horace Hyman Wilson, *Essays and Lectures chiefly on the Religion of the Hindus*, ed. Reinhold Rost (2 vols. London, Trübner & Co., 1861-62), I, 181 f.; Rev. M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes as Represented at Benares*,

Dressing-room talks with members of the troupe revealed that they were prepared to perform a new play each day for three weeks. In addition to the dramas already mentioned, their repertoire included plays based on the lives of the following devotees: Karmeti Bāī, Mādhav Dās, Mīrā Bāī, Rām Dās, Sudāmā, Jaydev, Caitanya, Prahlād, Vibhīṣaṇ, Kabīr, Śabarī, Tilocan, Kevaṭ, Gorāī Kumhār, Dāmā Panth, Nishkiṇcan, and Sākshī Gopāl.<sup>3</sup> The plays exist in writing only in the manuscripts of the troupe. They have been written specifically for these players by Bābā Dīnabandhu Dās.

The tone, technique, and subject matter of these plays will be illustrated by reproducing here the major scenes of the troupe's Kabīr Nāṭak, performed at Uṛiyā Bābā's āśram on August 26, 1949. The scenes given in full are the author's shorthand record of a simultaneous oral translation by Mr. Kanhaiyā Lāl Gupta, M.Sc., M.L.A., of Vṛindāban. Since such hasty translation necessarily involved some condensation and omission, the notes have been edited to the extent of occasional restoration of connective words and phrases.

When the author and his friend seated themselves in the hall at nine o'clock in the morning, the drama of the day had just begun. On the stage, Kabīr was facing a wrathful brahman of Banāras.

BRAHMAN:

You must not say that anyone can be equal to a brahman. You are a disciple of Rām, and Rām used to worship brahmans. *No one* can be equal to a brahman !

KABĪR:

All who take refuge in the protection of God are of the same worth. God never gives any sort of superiority to anyone. A brahman is a brahman, no doubt, but if an untouchable, even, worships God, then he is better than a brahman.

BRAHMAN:

You actually seem to be saying that a śūdra can come up to the level of a brahman. If you keep insisting on this, I shall have to call all the brahmans together to take this matter up with you.

KABĪR:

Yes, call all the brahmans. I am ready to have a discussion with them at any time !

*Exit both.*

*In the next scene Kabīr enters with a piece of new cloth over his arm. From his monologue we learn that the hungry weavers of his family have sent him to sell this product of their*

pp. 266 f.; Balesvar Prasād, *Santbānī-saṅgraha* (2 vols. Allahabad, Belvedere Press, 1922), 2, 36; Paraśurām Caturvedī, *Uttarī Bhārat kī Sant-parampara* (Prayāg, Bhāratī Bhāṇḍār, 1951), pp. 99–101.

<sup>3</sup> The tales of some of the obscurer persons in this list are told outside the *Bhaktamāl* in the following : *Tilocan* : Macauliffe, 6, 40. *Kevaṭ* : Tulsidās, *Rāmaritmanās*, ed. Poddār, pp. 385 ff. *Gorāī Kumhār* : C. A. Kincaid, *Tales of the Saints of Pandharpur* (2nd ed. London, Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 92–96 ; *Kalyān*, 12 (saṃvat 1994 [A.D. 1937]), *sant anik*, p. 492. *Sākshī Gopāl* : Bhakti Pradīp Tīrtha, *Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu* (Calcutta, Gaudiya Mission, 1947), pp. 164 ff.; Kṛishṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*, trans. Sanjīb Kumār Chaudhuri (Calcutta, Nāgendra Kumār Roy, 1956), pp. 82–93.

loom and bring home food. He is approached by a shivering half-dressed beggar who pleads for the cloth. Kabīr tears it in two and gives half to him. A second beggar comes, and Kabīr gives to him the other half of the cloth. In despair, Kabīr then goes off into the forest (front left), sits down, and in bhajans calls for Rām's help. His singing becomes muted, and our attention is drawn to the rear of the stage, where the curtain has opened upon the main room of Kabīr's house. His hungry mother sits there alone, bemoaning the long absence of her son. From a corner of the stage a bejeweled visitor peeps in upon this scene. By his high cylindrical crown we know him to be Rām. The deity confides to the audience :

RĀM:

My devotee Kabīr has been worshipping me in the forest these last three days. His family is in need. I must provide for them.

Stepping offstage for a moment, Rām returns immediately in the guise of a wealthy merchant (seth), carrying bags of money. Insisting that the mother accept these as charity, the seth goes away leaving the bags on her floor. The curtain closes on Kabīr's home. Our attention is attracted again to the forestage, where Kabīr, still sitting 'in the forest', is heard singing the kīrtan 'Jay Sitā Rām jay, jay Sitā Rām !' A sādhu enters.

SĀDHU:

Why are you sitting here while money lies heaped up in your house ? The poor are being fed there, and here you are, sitting in the forest !

KABĪR:

Who could have done this but the Lord Rām ? This money has been given by the Lord, and it must be used to bestow charity on poor people.

*Exit Kabīr.*

### Interlude

*The curtain opens on a shivering old seth seated on a divan. His white whiskers bob while he shakes and coughs. The old man is feeble and tired. His son and daughter-in-law, at the other side of the room, make remarks which indicate that they are tired of him. Enter Nārad, the messenger between heaven and earth.*

NĀRAD:

Old man, I bring you happy news from the heavenly regions ! Śrī Kṛishṇa is eager to have more people with him in Golokdhām, and has sent me to deliver to you his special invitation to come direct to heaven. Sir, you are weary and very miserable : Why not come away to heaven ?

SETH:

I would be glad to come to heaven, but I am about to have a grandchild. I must live a little longer to see my grandson. No, thank you, I don't want to go to heaven just yet. Later. Not now !

*Exit Nārad. After a little more coughing, the old seth crumples up and dies. His daughter-in-law covers him with a cloth.*

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW:

Husband, you must go quickly and make all the arrangements for the funeral rites.

SON:

I'm hungry. I'd rather eat first. [A ghastly exhibition of filial disrespect.]

## REGIONAL DRAMAS

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW:

Hush ! We must look respectably sad.

*Both weep loudly. The curtain closes.*

*Nārad enters at right front and circles about.*

NĀRAD (to himself) :

The Lord has sent me again to see whether anyone is ready of his own free will to accept a call to heaven. But I find everyone greedy for this life.

*He arrives at the seth's house, i.e. before the curtain.*

Ho there ! Sethjī ! Are you at home ?

*There is a barking noise at the base of the curtain, and out leaps a 'dog'—a small actor covered with a brown cloth. The dog is, of course, the miser reborn. Nārad stoops and touches the animal, thus enabling it to converse.*

O Sethjī, can it be you ? I asked you to come to heaven with me, but you refused. Now see the plight you are in ! Throw aside this wretched form ! Come with me now !

THE DOG:

You may want to take me to heaven, but I won't go. I'm keeping guard here over the money I have earned. I won't leave this place until my boys grow up and learn how to take care of my wealth themselves.

NĀRAD (leaving) :

Why are you so devoted to your gold ? Goodbye, poor dog !

*To himself.*

I promised the Supreme Spirit that I would bring all miserable people to heaven. But, whomsoever I approach, he refuses to go. Everyone is so much attached to the things of this world !

*Exit Nārad.*

## Main Story

*Enter three brahmans, in discussion.*

FIRST BRAHMAN:

Where has Kabīr obtained all this money with which he is feeding the poor and making such a big name for himself throughout Banāras ?

SECOND BRAHMAN:

We must make a thorough probe into the source of these funds of his.

THIRD BRAHMAN:

It is a trick of his guru Rāmānand. By distributing charity through his disciple, Rāmānand hopes to make himself popular and spread his sect.

SECOND BRAHMAN:

We shall demand that he give money not only to poor people, but to us brahmans as well.

FIRST BRAHMAN:

We really shouldn't accept gifts from such vulgar people as he is. He is a low-caste man.

*They fall into controversy but in the end agree to be broad-minded on this point.*



SECOND BRAHMAN:

So we shall go to Kabīr's house now and demand cash alms from him.

*They circle the stage and approach the curtain. It is drawn back, revealing Kabīr at home. Kabīr comes forward to them, offering salutations.*

FIRST BRAHMAN (*yelling in a harsh voice*):

Don't touch me ! Keep away, you low-born rogue !

THIRD BRAHMAN:

You have been giving away money in charity, right and left. You will explain this, hear !

SECOND BRAHMAN:

Don't address him in such an angry tone. Explain things to him calmly.

FIRST BRAHMAN:

One can't be lenient with such fellows. One must speak to them harshly. See here, you ! You have insulted brahmans by not giving alms to them. You have given money to sādhus and poor persons, but not to brahmans.

THIRD BRAHMAN:

Money given in alms is to be distributed among *all* the devotees of the Lord. Do you mean to say, by this behavior of yours, that brahmans are not among the Lord's devotees ?

FIRST BRAHMAN:

Where did you get this money ? You must be committing robberies.

KABĪR.

The Lord gave me the money ; I have not stolen it.

FIRST BRAHMAN:

If you hadn't, you would be sharing your money with brahmans as well. If you don't start giving to brahmans, too, we shall run you out of Banāras !

KABĪR:

Please wait here a little. I shall arrange to give you money.

*Exit Kabīr.*

SECOND BRAHMAN:

Now he has made his getaway. Don't expect him ever to come back with anything for us.

*The god Rām looks in on the scene from a corner of the stage.*

RĀM:

Just see how my devotee Kabīr is being tormented ! To save his honor I must provide some money for him.

*Exit Rām.*

*The musicians lead the crowd in the kīrttan, 'Sītā Rām, Sītā Rām, Rādhe Śyām, Rādhe Śyām !'*

*Re-enter Rām in servant's disguise, effected merely by wrapping a cloth cover about his crown. He carries bags of money.*

## REGIONAL DRAMAS

RĀM (*to the brahmans*):

I have been sent by Kabīr to present these offerings to your reverences.

*He presents to each of the three brahmans a bag of coins.*

FIRST BRAHMAN:

Money from a man of such vile caste is hardly fit to be accepted.

*But he takes it.*

SECOND BRAHMAN (*turning away*):

We must still find out the source of all this wealth. Kabīr must be exposed and driven out of town before his cult spreads any further.

*Exit the brahmans.*

*The swelling hubbub of a joyful crowd receiving alms is now heard at rear. There are shouts of 'Jay Kabīr !' Enter Rām, still in disguise.*

RĀM:

Now I must go and bring Kabīr back to his house. He thinks the brahmans are still sitting here waiting for their money.

*Rām crosses the stage and walks past Kabīr, who is once again sitting downstage 'in the forest'.*

RĀM (*to Kabīr*):

Why are you sitting here while brahmans are being given alms at your house?

*Exit Rām.*

KABĪR:

It must be Rām who has done all these things to save my honor. Since the Lord is so watchful over me, I must renounce my worldly vocation and devote myself entirely to him.

*Kabīr moves backstage toward his house. As he approaches it, shouts of 'Jay Kabīr ! Jay Kabīr ! Kabīrjī kī jay jay !' are heard from that direction.*

KABĪR :

I must leave the world rather than be spoiled by being worshiped in this way. I shall do such an act that people will look on me with hateful eye and turn away from me.

*Finding a prostitute sitting at the side of the street, Kabīr raises her up and walks up and down arm-in-arm with her. The three brahmans enter and see the pair.*

FIRST BRAHMAN:

This is a disgraceful thing for him to be doing ! We shall tell his disciples how they are praising him for nothing !

*Exit brahmans.*

KABĪR :

Good ! Now I shall be rid of all this adulation.

*Exit Kabīr.*

## Interlude

*Enter Nārad. Beating the time with a small kartāl in each hand, he sings a kīrttan beginning 'Nā-rā-yaṇ, Nā-rā-yaṇ, śrīman Nā-rā-yaṇ!' Circling the front of the stage, he approaches the one-time home of the seṭh.*

NĀRAD :

I have come again to try to take the seṭh to heaven. He is not living here in the form of a dog any longer. He has died and has been reborn as an ox.

*As he draws near, an 'ox' ambles out around the end of the curtain. Again, the animal is a stooping actor covered with a cloth.*

O foolish mortal! Now you have departed the body of a dog only to become a bullock at the door of your grandchildren. You are getting harsh treatment from them. I entreat you now to come along with me to heaven and leave this miserable world.

THE OX :

I would be willing to come to heaven, but every day my son brings merchandise from Mathurā for his shop, and I pull the cart for him. If I were to go to heaven, he would have to pay high cartage charges for that.

NĀRAD (*departing*) :

I admit defeat! I have not been able to get one wretched soul to come to heaven. Everyone is greedy for this life and for the things of this world.

*Exit Nārad.*

## Main Story

*Scene: the court of the Mahārājā of Banāras. Enter the brahmans.*

FIRST BRAHMAN :

O King, we have serious news for you. Kabīr has been found out in a shameful deed. The scandal is all over the city. Your guru, who calls himself a saint, has been loitering about the streets with a prostitute!

MAHĀRĀJĀ :

This is a surprising report. My spiritual guide can hardly have done such an act.

SECOND BRAHMAN :

We're not lying. You may ask any person in the entire city.

MAHĀRĀJĀ :

When I accepted him as my guru, I never expected such behavior from him. Call Kabīr!

*A messenger goes, and returns with Kabīr. When Kabīr enters, the Mahārājā remains seated—a manifestation of gross disrespect toward a guru.*

KABĪR (*aside*) :

I know he has heard the report about me, because he shows me no reverence.

*From his personal waterpot Kabīr begins to sprinkle water about over the floor.*

## REGIONAL DRAMAS

MAHĀRĀJĀ:

What are you doing ?

KABĪR :

A priest in Jagannāth Purī has burned his foot, and I am cooling the burn.

A BRAHMAN :

This is all humbug. Nobody here in Banāras can know what is happening in Purī.

MAHĀRĀJĀ:

I shall send a messenger and find out whether what he says is true or not. O sepoy ! go to Jagannāth Purī and ask at the temple there whether on this day, at this hour, any priest's foot has been burned.

*Exit the sepoy. Until his return, Kabīr leads the audience in the kīrttans 'Jay Sītā Rām jay, jay Sītā Rām', and 'Jay Rām, jay Rām, jay jay Rām!' Re-enter the sepoy.*

SEPOY:

I have made inquiries at Purī, and the word of Kabīr is true. A priest burned his foot badly on that day. Since then it has healed.

MAHĀRĀJĀ :

Now I shall never get salvation because I have insulted my guru ! God can forgive an affront to himself but not an affront to his devotees. There is no greater sin than the sin of insulting one's teacher. How can I ever get salvation now ? What remedy is there ?

A BRAHMAN :

With hands and feet bound, you must throw yourself into the Ganges to drown. If your guru chooses to forgive you, he will save you.

*Curtain.*

*In the next scene we see the Mahārājā standing on the riverbank with tied hands, preparing to drown himself. Kabīr appears. He protests against the cruel suggestion of the brahmans and forgives and soothes his disciple. The two go offstage together, singing a kīrttan.*

## Interlude

*Enter Nārad.*

NĀRAD:

I've made several trips to this earth and have entreated a number of people to go with me to heaven, but I've had no success. Let me try again.

*Nārad walks toward the house of the onetime seṭh, trolling a spirited kīrttan:*

*'Hare Kṛishṇa, Hare Kṛishṇa, Kṛishṇa Kṛishṇa, Hare Hare!  
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare!'*

NĀRAD (arriving):

That ox is not here any longer ! Where are you, seṭhjī?

*The only reply is a low squeak, coming from the base of the curtain. Hearing it, Nārad stoops, and catches sight of something too small to be seen by the audience.*



NĀRAD :

Alas, have you finally come to this? First a prosperous shopkeeper, then a dog, then an ox—and now a maggot in the open sewer outside your grandchildren's house. And do you *still* want to cling to this world? You are dragging out such a pitiable existence here !

THE MAGGOT :

O no ! I'm quite happy here in the gutter. The children come out and play and eat their food here, and the little scraps that they drop, I eat. I like it here !

NĀRAD :

Oh worldly creature ! So long as your heart longs for life in this world or runs after wealth, you cannot get salvation.

THE MAGGOT :

Am I the *only* soul you have to worry about? Must you get *me*, and me only, into heaven?

NĀRAD :

I have had no *time* to look after the others, I have had such trouble with you ! And now, since you are so ignorant of what is for your own welfare, I am going to pick you up and take you to heaven whether you like it or not !

*Raising a tiny thing from the floor, he wraps it in the loose end of his dhoti. Exit Nārad. The curtain at rear now opens on the heaven of Kṛishṇa. Enter Nārad, dragging behind him the reluctant seṭh, now once again in human form.*

SEṬH (*entering heaven*) :

I testify that I have not come here of my own free will. I have been hauled here by force !

*Two attendants have been holding up a sheet across the opposite corner of the backstage. They now remove it. The god Kṛishṇa is disclosed, in glittering costume, sitting in state upon his heavenly throne. Under the divinity's gaze the seṭh is at last subdued. He staggers and falls to his knees.*

SEṬH :

O Master, you are a Lord of irresistible might ! I tried to defeat your mysterious power, but I have been defeated. O Lord of Mercy, you have made my welfare your own concern. Forgive my foolish mistakes !

NĀRAD (*shaking a playful finger at the seṭh*) :

Now don't let the notion enter your head that you will go back to earth again !

*Curtain.*

## Main Story

*Two brahmans enter the forestage. Their talk discloses that they are going to Delhi to carry to the emperor a complaint against Kabīr. Winding about the stage, they arrive in front of the imperial palace, i.e. the curtain. A sepoy emerges, wearing a fez.*

FIRST BRĀHMAN :

Kindly inform the emperor that two brahmans have come from Banāras to see him.

*The sepoy opens the curtain. A bearded ruler is seen, seated on a throne, flanked by several attendants.*

## REGIONAL DRAMAS

THE BRAHMANS :

O emperor, *salām* !

*They bow low. [For brahmans to bow before a ruler is disgracefully obsequious behavior.]*

EMPEROR :

What has brought you to my gate ?

FIRST BRAHMAN :

We have a complaint to bring before you. In our city a Hindu teacher named Rāmānand has converted a Muslim weaver named Kabīr. He has started betaking himself to the temple instead of to the mosque. If you do not put a stop to this sort of thing all your Muslims will become Hindus.

EMPEROR :

We shall call a halt to this !

*(To sepoy)* Bring Kabīr here under arrest!

*Sepoy leaves and comes back with Kabīr. Kabīr enters without bowing to the emperor.*

ATTENDANT :

Why are you so ill-mannered ? Bow to the emperor !

KABĪR :

I do obeisance only to Sītā Rām.

EMPEROR :

Why have you left your own religion and become a Hindu ?

KABĪR :

I don't find any difference in them. Some say Rām, some say Rahīm.

EMPEROR :

He does not abandon his Sītā Rām so easily. Sepoy, tie him hand and foot and throw him into the Jamunā !

*Sepoy leads Kabīr away, and shortly returns.*

SEPOY :

We have just bound him tightly according to your order, and have thrown him into the deepest part of the Jamunā River.

*Before the sepoy finishes speaking, Kabīr himself strōlls out upon the stage.*

SEPOY :

How is it possible that he has come back alive ?

EMPEROR :

Sepoy, you have taken a bribe and set him free !

SEPOY :

No, he must have some magic power !

EMPEROR :

I am determined to make him give up the name of Sīta Rām. Throw him into the fire !

*Sepoy takes Kabīr out again and re-enters.*

SEPOY :

I have fastened him down under a great heap of faggots and set fire to them.

EMPEROR :

If he comes out of that alive, your skin will not be safe !

*Kabīr walks in. Great applause from the audience.*

Sepoy, he has paid you well for this ! Now tell me truthfully what you did !

SEPOY :

I swear that I left him chained in the middle of a vast pile of flaming logs !

EMPEROR :

I am ashamed that a man who is a Muslim should abandon his faith and take up another religion. I cannot rest. Kill him right here in my presence !

A BRAHMAN :

That is a fine plan. If you kill him before your own eyes, that will be the end of his repeating of the name. Put him under the feet of an elephant !

*An 'elephant' is brought in — a makeshift quadruped draped with a greyish sheet, its trunk a dangling strip of cloth. The elephant's trainer urges it upon Kabīr. The beast makes a few steps in Kabīr's direction, then shrieks, rears and backs away. The emperor rises.*

EMPEROR (to the brahmans) :

You wretches ! What do you mean by misleading me and causing this true devotee to suffer at my hands ? Kabīr's fame was rising and yours was falling, and you were jealous of him !

(To Kabīr) Kabīr, it is the True Name that you speak. I repent that I have given so much trouble to God's devotee. Forgive me.

*The emperor falls to his knees before Kabīr. The sepoy removes his fez and bows low.*

KABĪR :

Never mind, be at peace. Remember the merciful name of Rām and pray to him constantly. Depend upon the Lord. He will watch over you.

EMPEROR :

Kabīr, from this day, because the Hand of Mercy is upon me, Śrī Sītā Rām will I worship !

In a final attempt to discredit Kabīr, his brahman enemies try to bring down upon him the wrath of the sādhus of Banāras. In his name they invite hundreds of them to a feast at his house, without his knowledge. But Rām's providence, in the form of plentiful provisions, foils the schemers. The sādhus are fed, and at long last the brahmans are converted and forgiven. In the closing scene of the play, we see Kabīr's followers, Hindu and Muslim, standing over his

deathbed, disputing whether his body should be buried or burned. When someone finally pulls back the shroud, they find that the body is gone ! Where it had lain there is only a heap of flowers. The two factions divide the blossoms and carry their portions away singing the kīrtan :

*Raghupati Rāghav Rājā Rām, patita pāvana Sītā Rām !  
 Śvara Allah terā nām, sab ko sanmati de Bhagavān !*

Comparing the *Kabīr Nāṭak* with the account of Kabīr given by Nābhājī, we find a practical identity of substance and even the same order of episodes. It is evident that the playwright used the *Bhaktamāl* as his exclusive source, altering few details and adding few. The *Nāmdev Nāṭak* stands in the same close relation to the story of Nāmdev in the *Bhaktamāl*.

The core of the *Bhaktamāl Nāṭak Maṇḍalī* is a handful of adult men who have been performing together as a group since adolescence. The full troupe is a circle of about sixteen men and boys, all of whom are residents of the village of Khair in Alīgaṛh District. The various members keep coming and going to and from their village, relieving each other and going on leave. The actors work under the direction of the seniormost among them, an unassuming and cheerful man named Śrī Govind Gvārīā. A tie which helps to preserve the unity of the group is their common discipleship under a single guru, Svāmī Kṛishṇānand Dās of Alīgaṛh.

The wanderings of the troupe have taken it as far east as Gāyā and as far west as Jaypur, but not into the Panjab. In February 1950 the troupe returned to Vṛindāban and spent the entire month of the Kumbh Melā playing its dramas in a tent pitched on the sands of the Jamunā River.

The plays described in this chapter seem unlikely to represent any long-established form of drama. The writer of the entire set of scripts was still alive in 1950. The list of the types of vernacular drama given on page 3 includes no category into which these can be forced. Paṇḍit Rāmcandra Śukla, Bhāratendu Hariścandra, and others say that the Hindī prose drama, composed with exits and entrances for the stage, came into existence only in the middle of the last century through the influence of Bengali and English dramas and a revived familiarity with Sanskrit dramatic literature.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, this analysis is hotly disputed in a recent Hindī book by Dr. Daśarath Ojhā.<sup>5</sup> Though Dr. Ojhā by no means proves Paṇḍit Śukla and the others wrong, he does at least demonstrate how much is unknown about

<sup>4</sup> Hariścandra of Banāras, *Nāṭak* (Banāras, Medical Hall Press, 1883), pp. 42 f.; Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī-sāhitya kā Itihās* (Samvat 2005), pp. 460 f.; George A. Grierson, 'The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 57, Pt. I (1888, Special Number), 154.

<sup>5</sup> Daśarath Ojhā, *Hindī Nāṭak, Udbhav aur Vikās* (Delhi, Rājpal and Sons, 1956), pp. 46 ff., 125 f., and *passim*.



the forms of the living stage in North India before 1850. It seems best to say that we do not yet know the history of this type of play.

How frequently does an average North Indian community play host to troupes like the Bhaktamāl Nāṭak Maṇḍalī? The author has no basis for even a guess. But, wherever they may be at work, such troupes have a telling influence because they are masters in the art of holding the attention of unschooled minds. They leave behind them great numbers of people whose emotional loyalties have been awakened or intensified by these hero stories of the Vaiṣṇava faith.



## THE RĀMLĪLĀ

*Rāmlīlā* means, literally, ‘Rāma’s sport’. The uninitiated reader may think *sport* a trivial term to apply to dramas that rehearse the deeds of a deity as told in an epic regarded as sacred scripture. The word *līlā* must be translated thus, but the reader should understand that the English word *sport* represents a technical term of Hindu theology which has a special meaning. A major tradition of Hindu thought describes as ‘sports’ the whole of the divine acts in space and time. Confronted with the problem of how the Supreme Being, while axiomatically perfect and self-sufficient, could yet have had reason to produce the cosmos, Hindu thinkers have long taught that the creation, preservation and dissolution of worlds spring from no lack or need on the part of God, but are the manifestations of his spontaneous joyful disinterested creativity—are his sports.<sup>1</sup> Though the doctrine of *līlā* is not the whole of Vaishṇava thinking on this problem, it is an accepted Vaishṇava teaching. Not only Viṣṇu’s creation of the cosmos is viewed as *līlā*, but also his actions within the cosmos when he enters his creation in the form of his various incarnations. Thus the myths of all of Viṣṇu’s *avatāras* relate his sports, and Tulsīdās in the introduction to his *Rāmāyaṇa* can refer to the entire content of his *Rāmcaritmānas* as *Harilīlā* or sports of Hari (i.e. of Viṣṇu) in his Rāma-incarnation.<sup>2</sup> When dramas which enact systematically the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are called the ‘*Rāmlīlā*’, they are being identified by reference to their subject-matter.

<sup>1</sup> On *līlā* see *The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyana with the Commentary of Baladeva*, Sacred Books of the Hindus, 5 (Allahabad, The Panini Office, 1912), pp. 266 f.; *Vedāntasūtra*, II.1.33 with Rāmānuja’s commentary, trans. George Thibaut, *Sacred Books of the East*, 48, Pt. III, p. 477; Girindra Narayan Mallik, *The Philosophy of Vaiṣṇava Religion*, pp. 151–57; Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, pp. 260–64.

<sup>2</sup> Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas*, ed. Hanumānprasād Poddār, saṃvat 2004, p. 34, *caupāi* 3.

The performances which go by this name are based upon the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās. They cover the main incidents narrated in the *Rāmcaritmānas* in a series of performances lasting many days, and they employ a rare stage technique that combines recitation of the sacred text with simultaneous acting and dialogue.

The name 'Rāmlīlā' is sometimes applied to such plays even when they are produced at casual times by traveling companies of professional actors. Two such professional Rāmlīlā troupes were at work in Vṛindāban in August 1949, when the actors of Paṇḍit Dīp Cand held forth nightly on a platform erected in the fruit bazaar while another party was offering plays of the same sort in the nearby grain market. In November 1949 and again in February 1950 a group of Caube Brahman actors came from Mathurā and put on a month-long series of Rāmāyaṇa dramas. K. M. Jhaveri has noted the activities of such players in Gujarāt and Bombay, and Pāṇḍeya Becan Śarmā in his autobiography describes the organization and life of a troupe from Ayodhyā with which he acted in the Panjab and Northwest Frontier Province in 1910.<sup>3</sup> The season of Rāma's birthday in March (Caitra śukla 9th) is a time of year when all troupes capable of performing on Rāmāyaṇa themes are likely to be at work. These professional performances are sometimes called Rāmlīlā, but they are not *the* Rāmlīlā, and it is not these which come to mind when the word is used without qualification.

The great Rāmlīlā of North India is a distinct social institution, an annual feature of the *daśahrā* holidays which begin in the latter part of September. Unlike the other traditional forms of drama found in Mathurā District, the *daśahrā* Rāmlīlā is produced both by and for local people. It is organized, financed and staged in each town under the supervision of a committee selected for this duty in a roughly democratic manner by the local Hindu community. This is the Rāmlīlā which touches the experience of the average person who grows up in North India. It is this autumnal series of Rāmāyaṇa dramas which is described here.

The account which follows is based largely on personal observation and inquiry in Mathurā and Vṛindāban. The author attended ten Rāmlīlā performances in those towns and nearby Hāthras in the *daśahrā* season of 1949 and obtained the publicity materials of the actors of the town of Alīgaṛh. Friends from more distant cities contributed descriptions of the observance in their respective localities.<sup>4</sup> Actors and members of managing committees in Mathurā and Vṛindāban obligingly answered questions and supplied financial

<sup>3</sup> Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, *Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature*, p. 181; Pāṇḍeya Becan Śarmā, *Apni Khabar* (Delhi, Rājkamal Prakāśan, 1960), pp. 52-62.

<sup>4</sup> Special thanks are extended to Mr. Rādhā Kṛishṇa Miśra for data on the Rāmlīlā in Alīgaṛh and to Mr. Kiśorī Mohan Nigam for a detailed account of the Rāmlīlās of his childhood in Satnā, U.P.

reports and other printed literature of their societies. Finally, the author is indebted for useful descriptions to a half dozen writers of the past.<sup>5</sup> To be mentioned especially are an account of the Rāmlilā in Ghāzīpur written by H. Niehus in 1905 and James Prinsep's description of the festival in Banāras in 1825. Information on the practice of communities outside Mathurā District was of special value in distinguishing customs which are local from those which prevail throughout North India.

Deferring the question of how communities organize to produce these plays, we shall deal first with the actors and then with the unique stage methods. The actors are recruited from the community in which they perform. The minor parts in the plays are open to all boys and men who belong to one of the four castes and whose age is regarded as proper for a particular role. Opportunities to act in the Rāmlilā tend to be sought after particularly by certain families who provide a disproportionate number of the community's performers. The actors who take the roles of Rāma, his wife, and his brothers, however, must be of brahman caste because when they appear in costume and crown as the very embodiments (svarūps) of the divinities, even brahmans will bow down to them and worship them. A brahman boy may begin acting at about the age of ten, when he may take the role of one of King Daśaratha's children—Rāma, Bharata, Lakshmaṇa or Śatrughna—in the childhood scenes of the early books of the Rāmāyaṇa. On attaining the age of eleven or twelve, he may be selected for the role of Sītā. At thirteen or fourteen, if talented and fortunate, he can be entrusted with the part of the grown-up Rāma. He can hold this position for three or four years at the most. When hair appears on his upper lip, an inexorable law of the Vaiṣṇava stage demands that his career as a svarūp come to an end and a younger actor must be found to take his place.

<sup>5</sup> H. Niehus, 'Das Ram-festspiel Nordindiens', *Globus*, 87 (1905), 58–61; James Prinsep, *Benares Illustrated in a Series of Drawings*, Third Series (Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1833; London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1834), five unnumbered pages, two ills., 'Festival of the Ram Leela' and 'Bhurut Melao'; partially reprinted in *Selections from the Asiatic Journal* (Madras, Higginbotham & Co., 1875), pp. 865–67; Bishop Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay*, 1824–25, I (London, J. Murray, 1849), 190 ff.; Victor Jacquemont, *Voyage dans l'Inde*, I (Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, 1841), 213–15; John Campbell Oman, *The Great Indian Epics* (London, G. Bell & Sons, 1912), pp. 75–86; Alexandra David-Neel, *L'Inde : Hier-aujourd'hui-demain* (Paris, Librairie Plon, 1951), pp. 67–73; Mischa Titiev, 'A Dasehra Celebration in Delhi', *American Anthropologist*, 48 (Oct. 1946), 676–80; 'Hindu Passion Play', *Life*, Feb. 12, 1951, pp. 90–97. The above are partial and sometimes casual eyewitness accounts of the Rāmlilā. Jvālāprasād Miśra's compilation *Śrī Rāmlilā Rāmāyaṇa Saṅkīrṇa* (Bombay, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, 1904–05) includes directions for scenery, properties, casting, costumes and acting. Financial information has come largely from the published annual reports of several Rāmlilā committees, including Rādhāgovind Teñtīvālā, *San 1946 ke Āy Vyāy kā Vivaran*, *Śrī Pañcāyatī Rām-lilā* (Vṛindāban, Śrīkrishṇa Printing Press, n.d.); Keśavdev, *Hisāb Śrī Rāmlilā Āy-vyāy Sthān Mathurā san 1949 I*. (Mathurā, Syām Press, saṃvat 2006 [A.D. 1949]). To these materials Balwant Gargi has now added a valuable chapter in his *Folk Theater of India*, 1966, pp. 90–113.



Rāmlīlā actors are essentially amateurs even though they receive small cash payments and other favors. Out of the considerable treasuries raised to support the plays, Rs.555 was divided at the end of a recent season among the actors and workers in Mathurā, and Rs.161 among those in Vṛindāban. In view of the large number of persons included in the distributions and their month-long labors, the small individual shares were tokens of appreciation rather than pay. Free food is provided for actors who remain on duty over meal hours. On the occasion of the enactment of Rāma's coronation, special admirers of any actor may come forward and place personal gifts in his hands, but the actors' chief gains are pleasure and prestige. The ancient disrepute of the Indian actor is not attached in the least degree to the performers of the Rāmlīlā. The boys who are selected for this work are highly respected and widely envied.

The *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās is the subject-matter of the Rāmlīlā. Its function is to convey to the Hindu public the words of this Rāmāyaṇa through musical recitation of the text and to make the meaning of that text clear and vivid through acting. In technique, the Rāmlīlā fuses the techniques of cantillation with those of the drama. Recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa has the priority and determines the structure of the performance. The central person in all the stage proceedings is the chanting paṇḍit. From a prominent vantage point on or near the stage, he sings out to audience and actors the lines of the sacred text. One who wishes to follow the progress of the drama can do no better than to take a seat beside the paṇḍit and follow his recitation down the pages of his large Rāmāyaṇa from marked verse to marked verse. Sometimes he sings all the verses without omission for several pages together; then he may skip over many pages, pick out a verse or two here and there to serve as a bridge for the narrative, and pass on to a distant episode that has been selected for intensive dramatization.

Some communities consider it praiseworthy or even obligatory to read the entire Rāmāyaṇa on the stage during the days of the Rāmlīlā festival. Prinsep noted that in Banāras under the patronage of the mahārājā of that place 'nearly the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa is read through in the course of twenty or thirty days, and whatever incidents are capable of being acted, or displayed, are simultaneously exhibited'.<sup>6</sup> But in Banāras nowadays, according to Alexandra David-Neel, the entire epic is covered only in certain extraordinary years.<sup>7</sup> In Satnā thirty years ago the reading of every word of Tulsīdās was considered a strict duty. This sense of obligation involved the people of Satnā in occasional trying situations. The *Rāmcaritmānas* contains numerous descriptive passages which simply could not be cast into lively stage action, and the

<sup>6</sup> Prinsep, first page.

<sup>7</sup> David-Neel, p. 67.

majority of the local people no longer understood the archaic language well enough to enjoy it as mere literary recitation. Therefore ingenious devices were employed to lighten the burden of the audience yet fulfil the letter of the law. The book was so divided for stage use that a night's performance ended just at the point in the text where such a wearisome passage began. The next day the paṇḍits would arrive early at the place of assembly and sing the passage through dutifully to an almost empty theater, finishing just as the crowds began to arrive. If an undramatic passage of some length fell unavoidably in the middle of an evening's program, the singers proceeded through it in subdued voice while the audience was pleasantly diverted by a dance or farcical interlude.

The Rāmlīlā players of the Mathurā area feel free to make whatever selection they wish from the Rāmāyaṇa. Some incidents of the epic are omitted entirely; others are presented in abstract, so to speak; and still others are produced in full with great pomp and emphasis. The body of selections is adjusted in quantity so that it can be acted out in the time allotted to the local dramatic festival. The chosen episodes are grouped into units that can be presented at one sitting. The resulting calendar of performances is published before the start of the season in the form of a large handbill or poster (*līlāpatra*). A comparison of the handbills of a number of towns showed that each community's selection is different. Each town's way of editing the Rāmāyaṇa for the stage tended to be traditional, the same selection of incidents being repeated year after year.

The statement that the *Rāmcaritmānas* is the substance of the Rāmlīlā requires several qualifications. First, there are or have been some exceptional communities which cling to the name and season of the Rāmlīlā but base their acting upon new stage scripts which are related only loosely to the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās. In Hindī libraries one finds many works entitled *Rāmlīlā Nāṭak* or the like, which on examination prove to be efforts to cast the story of Rāma into modern Hindī verse plays explicitly for the use of community Rāmlīlā troupes.<sup>8</sup> Though verses from the *Rāmcaritmānas* predominate in these works, almost all the compilers admit using poetry from other sources as well. Such books seem to have been produced and used especially in the districts of Nainī Tāl and Almorā, where they may have helped to ease a special language problem. The author has no information on their use in any other place. Wherever these more conventional play-scripts

<sup>8</sup> Rāmdatt Jyotirvid, *Śrī Rāmlīlā Nāṭak* (Allahabad, Paṇḍit Badrīprasād Pāṇḍe, 1909; 4th ed., Etawah, 1929); Nārāyaṇa Sahāya Gosvāmī, *Śrīrāmlīlā Nāṭaka Rāmāyaṇa* (Mathurā, Sundar Śringār Kāryālaya, 1911); Gosvāmī Lakshmaṇācārya, *Śrīrāmlīlā Rāmāyaṇa* (Mathurā, Sundar Śringār Kāryālaya, 1914); Paṇḍit Pītāmbhar Tripāthī, *Rāmlīlā Nāṭak* (Nainī Tāl, K. D. Karnatak Brothers, 1929).

have been adopted, the systematic recitation of the *Rāmcaritmānas* itself has necessarily ceased.

The Vṛindāban actors in their dialogue make some use of poetic compositions on Rāmāyaṇa themes written by a recent poet named Rādhesyām. His modern Hindī verse is much more easily intelligible to present-day audiences than the now-difficult poetry of Tulsī. In keeping with the general Indian literary custom of resorting to poetic expression in emotional situations, the actors in intense scenes often abandon their usual prose dialogue for the verses of Rādhesyām. His poetry has a limited use in Satnā as well. In neither town does it replace the *Rāmcaritmānas* as the text of basic recitation.

Finally, the bulky editions of the *Rāmcaritmānas* used by the paṇḍits contain a good deal of material which was not written by Tulsīdās. Printed for pious rather than scholarly use, they incorporate a number of interpolated stories (*kshepak*) which one cannot find in critically edited editions. One such interpolation elaborates into an episode the incident of Śabarī, the jungle woman who offered Rāma her best hospitality, although it was only an offering of wild fruits. The others include the story of how Sulocanā, the wife of Meghnād, became a *satī*, and the extended episode of Ahirāvaṇa's carrying off of Rāma and Lakshmaṇa into Pātāla, and the beloved passages in which Hanumān proves by tearing open his chest that the name of Rāma is written on his heart. These interpolations provide several of the most popular episodes of the Rāmlīlā performances.<sup>9</sup>

There is no need to retell here the familiar narratives which the Rāmlīlā dramatizes. With a few exceptions of the kind just mentioned, they are the stories told by Tulsīdās and may be read in the pleasant translations of F. S. Growse or W. Douglas P. Hill.<sup>10</sup> The scope and content of the whole of a city's observances may be seen in the translation of Mathurā's day-by-day calendar given in the Appendix to this book.

It will be noticed in that calendar that the presentations do not consist only of dramas. On the opening day and on the final day important rituals are performed. On numerous occasions throughout the season, pageants and processions—spectacles rather than dramas—are held in the streets and other public places. For instance, the gods go in procession to plead with Brahmā for help against the evil power of Rāvaṇa. Rāma and the demoness Tārakā lead their respective adherents through the streets and lock forces in

<sup>9</sup> The interpolations mentioned are included in the Mathurā stage copy of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, edited by Vidyāvāridhi Paṇḍit Jvālāprasād Miśra (20th ed., Bombay, Venkaṭeśvar Steam Press, saṃvat 1992 [A.D. 1935]).

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Salmon Growse, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsī Dās* (7th ed., Allahabad, Ram Narain Lal, 1937); W. Douglas P. Hill, trans., *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma* (Bombay, Indian Branch, Oxford University Press, 1952).



decisive combat. When Rāma is to be married to Sītā, he travels to her parental home in a colorful wedding procession like that of mortal bridegrooms.<sup>11</sup> Later, Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmaṇa walk barefoot to the edge of the city on the sad road to exile, amidst the genuine tears of many who line the streets. The citizens pour forth in a body to visit them at Citrakūṭ, which is identified for the time being with a certain spot in the suburbs. And when all the trials of the heroic family are finished, the victorious Rāma returns to meet his brother Bharata, traveling in triumphal procession with his monkey friends and allies.<sup>12</sup> The last and greatest of these vast open-air spectacles is the *Rāvaṇvadh*, the great pageant of the slaying of Rāma's demon enemy. In the Mathurā festivities this spectacle was massively and crudely presented under the open sky on the afternoon of the *Vijayādaśamī* day, before a crowd equal in number to the entire population of the city. The arena was a sunken field at the edge of town, surrounded by banks and hillocks from which a hundred thousand people looked on. At one end of the field, colossal paper effigies of Rāvaṇa and his brother Kumbhakaraṇa (Kumbhakarāṇ) manned the flimsy walls of a paper 'fortress' of Laṅkā. There was some semblance of mute drama as Rāma and his monkey cohorts swarmed on the scene and prepared to attack. Two carriages bearing impersonators of Rāma and Rāvaṇa circled round and round in lively imitation of the tactical gyrations of the chariots of the two champions in combat. A great shout went up as Rāvaṇa was struck down. The ebullient crowd swarmed through the lines of

<sup>11</sup> The wedding procession (*barāt*) took four hours to make its round of the city of Mathurā. As in any wedding procession, a corps of drummers (*tāśāvāle*) headed the column. In this case they were bearded Muslims. The royal brothers and their relatives brought up the rear. In between rolled the floats and exhibits of every person who had any kind of animate or inanimate conveyance and a desire to display something. On one float the Rāmāyaṇa Pracārīṇī Sabhā, a religious organization, conducted a mobile kathā or public reading of the Rāmāyaṇa. Merchants sat on carts piled with their choicest merchandise, demonstrating their wares and passing out advertisements to the onlookers. The slow procession brought the goddess Kālī into view, seated upon a moving throne. On the petition of a walking attendant that she manifest her powers, she leaped down to the street. In a ferocious charge down the pavement and back she swept the narrow street with terrifying circles of her flashing sword. The crowd scattered pell-mell. Śiva and Pārvatī came by on a glittering jeep in the role of special friends and clients of the Vaishṇava deities—the status usually granted them in this overwhelmingly Vaishṇava area. The seething crowd closed in tightly around all the floats save that of a snake-charmer who, with urgent generosity, kept trying to bestow handfuls of serpents on all bystanders within his reach.

<sup>12</sup> The number and nature of the processions vary greatly from town to town according to local desires and the funds available for these costly affairs. In Aligarh, judging by their printed calendar, some sort of procession is held every day. The Hāthras program mentions five only; and in Vṛindāban only the procession of Rāma's wedding and that of his final reunion with Bharata are held. In 1944 a group of young men gained control of the Vṛindāban festival on a platform of eliminating the multiplicity of processions, holding that they did not confer aesthetic or educational benefit proportionate to their extraordinary expense. Even now, almost half of the Vṛindāban budget goes to the support of the two processions which are still held.



police, the walls of Laṅkā were torn to tatters, and the images of the demons went up in flames.<sup>13</sup>

On the evening of the day of the Rāvaṇvadh pageant, the conflict which had been shown roughly in the afternoon was given serious dramatic rendering on the Mathurā Rāmlilā troupe's principal covered stage. In all Rāmlilās of the author's experience there existed this fundamental distinction between the outdoor processions and pageants, on the one hand, and the less spectacular but more polished stage presentations on the other. Jvālāprasād Miśra in his Hindī manual for Rāmlilā troupes shows that this differentiation is widely recognized:

It is clear that the Rāmlilā can be of two kinds, the first on the open field, the second on a curtained stage. The lilā that is performed on a stage goes on in the style of a play. . . . The first kind of lilā takes place after a ring has been made in the open field. Only such action is performed in it as is suitable for common people to see.<sup>14</sup>

In Mathurā, Vrindāban, and in all the towns near and far of which the author has direct knowledge, the festival involves performances of both sorts, and in no case are those of the first kind done in dumb show. Yet the Occidental writers who have mentioned the Rāmlilā have time and time again referred to it without any distinction of types as a pantomimic performance. Horace Hyman Wilson in *Selected Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus* calls it 'a mere spectacle', and Sylvain Lévi says of it, 'Dialogue is entirely omitted. . . . The action is cut up into a series of striking tableaux.'<sup>15</sup> These statements need not be taken with gravity because Wilson and Lévi take all their information from Jacquemont, who himself saw nothing of the Rāmlilā save the Rāvaṇvadh pageant at Barrackpore. On like grounds, we can ignore the many travelers, who have noticed and photographed the great public field events, called them 'the Rāmlilā' and referred to it as a mere pageant. What they say has no bearing on the more sophisticated but more secluded dialogue plays.

However, the description of the Rāmlilā's actors as voiceless is found also in writers who were not mere transient aliens but careful, settled observers whom one would expect to be aware of the existence of spoken dramas if there were any. Niehus, who gave detailed attention to the festival in Ghāzīpur, says, 'The performance consists entirely of pantomimes, to which the text is read out from the Rāmāyaṇa.' And Prinsep reports from Rāmnagar in Banāras, 'The whole of the acting is necessarily in dumb show, and the

<sup>13</sup> The best descriptions of the Rāvaṇvadh pageantry are those in Titiev, *American Anthropologist*, 48, 676-80; Prinsep; and *Life*, Feb. 12, 1951, pp. 90-97.

<sup>14</sup> Jvālāprasād Miśra, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Horace Hyman Wilson, *Selected Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus* (3rd ed., 2 vols., London, Trübner & Co., 1871), I, xxix; Sylvain Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien*, p. 317; likewise Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 42.

*dramatis personae* are so numerous, and in general so unskilled in their duty, that the leaders . . . have great difficulty in making the performance keep pace with the oral declamation of the choir, or band of priests, who chaunt the sacred legend.' Nārāyaṇa Sahāya Gosvāmī in the preface to his *Śrīrāmlīlā Nāṭaka Rāmāyaṇa* says that in some towns the acting of the Rāmlīlā goes on in the manner of a play, but that 'generally in the Rāmlīlās it is the paṇḍits who recite the verses; the svarūps are only made to sit in the guise of images'. The Gosvāmī would not underestimate, of course, the need for the dialogues which he is publishing, but we must accept his statement about the frequency of the use of mute actors. The testimony of these well-informed persons leads us to believe that in the past (and perhaps even now) there have been many communities which attempt nothing beyond the public pageants, associating their reading of the Rāmāyaṇa with these inarticulate outdoor shows. Some may even produce the smaller stage plays in pantomime.

The idea suggests itself that the pantomime may have been the original form of the Rāmlīlā and that the stage performance with dialogue may have made its appearance only through the influence of the modern Hindī play, which was nascent in the latter half of the last century. However, we have evidence that there were speaking actors on the Rāmlīlā stage before the first Hindī prose dramas were written. Gopīnāth Tivārī in his recent *Bhāratendukālin Nāṭak Sāhitya* relates the personal reminiscences of a very old man, born in 1826, who described to him the dialogue in both prose and verse which was used by the Rāmlīlā actors of his childhood.<sup>16</sup> And as we shall see, a comparison of the Rāmlīlā with the modern play does not encourage the belief that the former is the offspring of the latter. The modern dialogue drama has exerted a marginal influence on the Rāmlīlā tradition, but the product has been the class of aberrant Rāmlīlā nāṭakas mentioned above. So we shall assume that it is the pantomimic Rāmlīlā which is the epiphenomenon. It is probably a local simplification, the resort of communities which undertake the observances with limited resources in training, funds, interest, or energy. At any rate the dialogue drama which prevails in the Rāmlīlā today is not a recent development.

The Rāmlīlā one may see today is full drama. Its dialogue is subordinated to textual recitation, it is true, but the subordination does not mean that dialogue is minor in quantity. Its dependence is functional. The recitation carries the thread of the story and thus determines the speech and action of the performers. The paṇḍit, ever the key man in the proceedings, sings out the *dohās*, *caupāīs* and *sorathās* of the printed page in the

<sup>16</sup> Gopīnāth Tivārī, *Bhāratendukālin Nāṭak Sāhitya* (Jalandhar and Allahabad, Hindī-Bhavan, 1959), p. 80.

ever-recurring tunes appropriate to their meters.<sup>17</sup> If the acting is being done on a proper stage, the paṇḍit's lectern is usually seen at its right-hand border. He and his accompanists often sit on a small detached platform which projects into the audience slightly in advance of the main stage and to its right. Frequently he uses a microphone and amplifier to make himself heard above the sometimes boisterous chatter of the crowd. In Vṛindāban, where most of the acting is done out-of-doors, the paṇḍit seated himself on a table placed at the edge of the rectangle of dusty lawn which served as a stage. In swift-moving action scenes he sometimes descended to the sidelines and strode up and down with the tides of battle, holding his book before him and singing out the verses in a stentorian voice. As these paṇḍits begin their scriptural chant from one of these vantage points, the performers on the stage begin to display in bodily motion the action being narrated, and when the verses of the Rāmāyaṇa have reported the words of this or that personality, the paṇḍit pauses while on the stage the appropriate actor repeats the substance of the speech in modern Hindī prose. Sometimes the actor's utterance is a fairly literal translation of the Rāmāyaṇa passage; sometimes it is a paraphrase, and sometimes a fanciful elaboration along lines which the text merely suggests or provides with a reasonable occasion.

How cantillation and dialogue are interwoven may be seen in the transcription below of a sound-recording made at an actual performance. The recording was made on the Rāmlīlā stage in Mathurā. The occasion was the enactment of the *Rājgaddī* or coronation of Rāma. After fourteen years of exile, Rāma is seated at last upon his rightful throne amidst the rejoicing people of Ayodhyā. The devout of Mathurā, acting nominally in the role of Rāma's loyal Ayodhyan subjects, press upward to the stage to salute their new sovereign. Rāma is thanking his helpers and allies of the late war and dismissing them with gifts. Brahmans chant the Vedas before their king and depart with rich rewards. Brahmā and Śiva pay their respects and take their leave. Here our recording begins.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Some of the melodies used currently in the Rāmlīlā in Banāras are recorded in Ethnic Folkways Library, *Religious Music of India*, New York, Folkways Records and Service Corporation.

<sup>18</sup> The text as far as chant 13 was obtained by sound-recording, transcribed by Mr. Govind Das Gupta, M.A., of Jhānsī. The remainder of the verses were copied from the stage copy of the Rāmāyaṇa, the associated speeches being dictated by the actors in a private session.

पाठ १ :

बरनि उमापति रामगुण  
हरषि गये कैलास ।  
तब प्रभु कपिन्ह दिवाये  
सब विधि सुखप्रद वास ॥

वह सोभा समाज सुख  
कहत न बनइ खगेस ।  
बरनइ सारद सेष स्तुति  
सो रस जान महेस ॥

उठेउ विभीषण तब सुख पाई  
रत्नमाल कर लई उठाई ।

विभीषण :

अहा, देखो जिस समय मेरे भ्राता रावण ने समुद्र को जीता था उस समय मेरे भाई को यह रत्न की माला दी थी ।

पाठ २ :

दीन्ह जलधि रावण कहँ जोई  
पुनः विभीषण पाई सोई ।  
सोई रत्नमाल सुखकारी  
दीन्ह जानकी के गल डारी ॥

विभीषण :

अब मैं इस माला को श्री महारानीजी के अर्पण करता हूँ ।

दर्शक :

बोल राजाराम ...

पाठ ३ :

तासु जोत अस भई बिसाला ।  
सम्मुख लख न सकत महिपाला ॥  
राज समूह अधिक तहँ सोहा ।  
तेहि विलोक सबकर मन मोहा ॥  
तेहि छन जनक-सुता महारानी ।  
चितै रामतन पुनि मुसकानी ॥  
कह्यो कृपाल प्रिया सुन लीजे ।  
जोई इच्छा जेहि कहँ सो दीजे ॥



CHANT 1 :

Umā's Lord <sup>19</sup> praised Rām's virtues,  
and, happy, he went to Kailās.  
Then the Lord arranged for the monkeys  
all sorts of easeful abodes.

That beauty, that pleasure in meeting,  
speech cannot tell, Lord of Birds.<sup>20</sup>  
Śārādā, Śesh, Veda describe it ;<sup>21</sup>  
such charm is known to Maheś.

Vibhīshaṇ, contented, arose then—<sup>22</sup>  
took up in his hand a necklace of gems.

VIBHĪSHAṆ :

O see ! When my brother Rāvaṇ conquered the Ocean, the Ocean gave my brother at that time this necklace of gems.

CHANT 2 :

What the Treasury of Waters gave to Rāvaṇ,  
Vibhīshaṇ received in turn.  
That same pleasing necklace of gems  
he dropped upon Jānakī's neck.

VIBHĪSHAṆ :

Now I make a presentation of this necklace to the revered queen !

BYSTANDER :

Cry out, ' Victory to King Rām ! '

CHANT 3 :

Its brilliance became so great  
the rulers could not gaze on it directly.  
It was more glorious there than the concourse of kings ;  
the hearts of all were charmed to see it.  
At that moment Janak's daughter the queen  
looked at Rām and then smiled.  
The gracious Rām said, ' Please listen, dear.  
Give whatsoever you wish to whomsoever you please.'

<sup>19</sup> Epithet of Śiva, Umā's husband.

<sup>20</sup> Garuḍa, to whom the story is being narrated.

<sup>21</sup> Great fluency is popularly ascribed to these beings : to Sarasvatī, goddess of speech ; to Ādiśeṣha, the primeval serpent ; and to the personified Vedas.

<sup>22</sup> This and all subsequent lines are an interpolation in the text of Tulsidās.

राम :

हे प्रिया, जिसे आप चाहो उसको ही यह माला दे दीजिये ।

पाठ ४ :

सुनत बचन तब जनक-दुलारी ।  
सोई गले से माल उतारी ॥  
काह देहुं यह हृदय विचारी ।  
मास्त-सुत की ओर निहारी ॥

सीता :

इस माला को किसे दूँ ?

पाठ ५ :

कृपा दृष्टि लख पवन-सुत  
हरषि दण्डवत कीन्ह ।  
रत्नमाल सोई जानकी  
डार गले में दीन्ह ॥

दर्शक :

बोल सीता महारानी की जय !

पाठ ६ :

महावीर मन माहि विचारी ।  
है कोई गुण माला में भारी ॥

हनुमान :

माताजी ने कृपा करके जो मणियों की माला मुझको दी है इस माला में अवश्य ही कोई विशेष गुण होगा । तभी मेरी अम्ब ने मेरे ऊपर कृपा की है ।

पाठ ७ :

परमानन्द-प्रेमरस-पागे ।  
मणियां सकल विलोकन लागे ॥  
बिनु प्रकाश कुछ और न तामें ।  
मन लागे भक्तन को जामें ॥

हनुमान :

माताजी ने कृपा करके अवश्य दी है परन्तु इसमें प्रकाश के सिवाय दूसरी वस्तु नहीं दीखती कि जिसमें भक्तों का मन लगना चाहिये ।

पाठ ८ :

मणि भीतर कछु त्वै है सारा ।  
मुक्ता एक तोड़ तब डारा ॥

हनुमान :

परन्तु माताजी की दीनी हुई चीज़ बिना महत्त्व के नहीं हो सकती । इसलिये इसकी मणियों के भीतर कुछ सार अवश्य होगा । एक दाना पहले तोड़ कर देखता हूँ ।

RĀM :

O Darling, please give this necklace to whomsoever you wish.

CHANT 4 :

Then the beloved daughter of Janak, hearing the speech,  
took the string of jewels from her neck.  
' To whom shall I give this ? ' she thought in her heart.  
She looked in the direction of the Son of the Wind.<sup>23</sup>

SĪTĀ :

To whom shall I give this necklace ?

CHANT 5 :

Noting her merciful glance, the Son of the Wind,  
pleased, made a prostration.  
That necklace of jewels the daughter of Janak  
dropped around his throat.<sup>24</sup>

BYSTANDER :

Cry out, ' Victory to Queen Sītā ! '

CHANT 6 :

Mahāvīr reflected in his mind,  
' There is some great excellence in the necklace.'

HANUMĀN :

In the necklace which the revered Mother has graciously given me there must surely be some special excellence. Only for this reason has my Mother shown me the favor.

CHANT 7 :

Soaked in the syrup of love for the Supremely Blissful One,  
he began to look at all the gems.  
' Save light, there's nothing else in it  
to appeal to the hearts of devotees ! '

HANUMĀN :

The revered Mother has doubtless given this out of kindness. But in it, apart from light, no other thing is visible to which the minds of devotees should be attracted.

CHANT 8 :

' Within the gem there must be some kernel.'  
Then he broke one pearl.

HANUMĀN :

But a thing given by Mother cannot be without importance. Therefore there surely must be some kernel inside these gems. I am going to break one bead first, and see.

(He crushes one bead between his teeth. Since the 'gems' are grapes, this is not difficult.)

<sup>23</sup> Hanumān.

<sup>24</sup> The story to this point is found in *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, ed. Kāśīnāth Pāndurang Parab (Bombay, Tukārām Jāvājī, 1902), VI.128.78-83, p. 967; and in the *Adhyātmārāmāyaṇa*, Laṅkākhanda, 16.5-8 (Calcutta Sanskrit Series, No. XI, 1935), II, p. 895. The source of the subsequent episodes is doubtful or unknown to the writer. The cracking of the jewels between Hanumān's teeth may have been suggested by Jvālāprasād Miśra's edition of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, pp. 831 f., wherein Vibhīṣaṇ at Rām's bidding showers raiment and gems down upon the monkeys, who stuff the precious things into their mouths.

पाठ ९ :

ताके मध्य विलोकन लागे ।  
देख लोग अचरज में पागे ॥

हनुमान :

इसके भीतर तो कुछ नहीं दीखता सिवाय चमक के । ऊपर भी जैसी चमक है उससे कहीं अधिक भीतर भी चमक है ।

पाठ १० :

पुनि दूजो तोड़यो हनुमाना ।  
देखि निसार तज्यो बलवाना ॥

हनुमान :

इसमें भी कुछ नहीं हैं !

पाठ ११ :

यहि विधि तोड़त क्रम क्रम मोती ।  
पीर अधिक दर्शक गण होती ॥

दर्शक :

अहा ! देखो, यह हनुमानजी इस मणियों की माला को इस प्रकार क्यों तोड़ डालते हैं ?

पाठ १२ :

कहन लगे निज निज मन माहीं ।  
जो कोई अधिकारी नाहीं ॥  
ताकों ऐसी वस्तु न दीजे ।  
नाहिं तों यही दशा लख लीजे ॥  
बोल उठयो कोउ नृपत तब  
कहा करत हनुमान ।  
क्यों तोड़त हो माल तुम  
सुन्दर रत्न सुजान ॥

दर्शक :

हे हनुमानजी, ऐसे सुन्दर अमूल्य रत्नों की माला को आप क्यों तोड़ तोड़ कर फेंक रहे हैं ?

पाठ १३ :

वचन सुनत मारुत कह बानी ।  
देखौ राम नाम सुखदानी ॥  
नाम न यामें परत लखाई ।  
ताते तोड़त डारत भाई ॥

हनुमान :

हे भ्राता, मैं इसमें सुख देनेवाले श्रीरामजी का नाम देख रहा हूँ । हे भ्राता, इसमें मेरे प्रभु का नाम नहीं दीखता, इस कारण इसे तोड़ रहा हूँ ।



CHANT 9 :

He began to scrutinize the inside of it.  
Seeing this, people were soaked in astonishment.

HANUMĀN :

Inside this, nothing is visible but luster. Just as there is luster outside, there is luster inside too, but far more than that.

CHANT 10 :

Then stout Hanumān broke another.  
Seeing it to be without kernel, he discarded it.

HANUMĀN :

There's nothing in this, either !

CHANT 11 :

In this way he breaks one pearl after another.  
It gives great pain to the multitude of bystanders.

BYSTANDER :

O look ! Why is Hanumān here breaking this necklace of gems in this way ?

CHANT 12 :

They began to say, each in his own mind,  
'To one who has no fitness  
Please do not give such a thing,  
or see the same sad state of affairs !'  
Then some king cried out,  
'What are you doing, Hanumān ?  
Why are you breaking the necklace—  
the beautiful jewels—O Wise One ?'

BYSTANDER :

O Hanumān, why are you breaking up and throwing away a necklace of such beautiful and priceless jewels ?

CHANT 13 :

Hearing the speech, the Son of the Wind said,  
'I am looking for the joy-giving name of Rām.  
The Name is not to be seen in this;  
that is why I am breaking it, O brother.'

HANUMĀN :

Brother, I am looking in it for the name of the joy-giving Rām. The name of my Lord is not visible in it, brother. That's why I'm breaking it.

पाठ १४ :

कह कोउ सकल वस्तु के माहीं ।  
राम नाम कहूँ सुनियत नाहीं ॥

दर्शक :

हे हनुमानजी, सब वस्तुओं के अन्दर राम नाम नहीं होता और हम ने अपने कानों से ऐसा कहीं नहीं सुना ।

पाठ १५ :

कह मारुत न नाम जेहि माहीं ।  
सो तो काहु काम की नाहीं ॥

हनुमान :

हे भ्राता, जिस वस्तु में मेरे प्रभु का नाम नहीं होता वह तो किसी काम की नहीं है ।

पाठ १६ :

बोल्यो सोई सुनो बलधामा ।  
तुम तन माहीं राम को नामा ॥

वही दर्शक :

हे बल के धाम हनुमानजी, क्या आपके हृदय में भी भगवान राम का नाम लिख रहा है ?

पाठ १७ :

सुनत वचन कह पवन-कुमारा ।  
निश्चय तनु हरि नाम उदारा ॥

हनुमान :

हाँ, मेरे शरीर में अवश्य ही परम उदार प्रभु का नाम होगा ।

पाठ १८ :

अस कह कपि निज हृदय विदारा ।  
रोम रोम प्रभु नाम अपारा ॥  
अंकित राम नाम सब ठाहीं ।  
लख सब चकित भये मन माहीं ॥  
पुष्प वृष्टि नभ जयति उचारी ।  
कृपा दृष्टि रघुनाथ निहारी ॥  
अंग भयो पुनि कुलिस सम  
उठे तुरत भगवान ।  
वारि विलोचन पुलक तन  
हिय लाये हनुमान ॥

CHANT 14 :

Someone said, ' One does not hear anywhere  
that the name of Rām is in all things ! '

BYSTANDER :

O Hanumān, the name of Rām is not inside everything, and we have never with our own ears  
heard anything to that effect anywhere !

CHANT 15 :

Said the Son of the Wind, ' What hasn't the Name in it  
isn't of any use at all. '

HANUMĀN :

O brother, that thing is not of any use in which there is not the name of my Lord !

CHANT 16 :

The same person said, ' Listen, O Abode of Strength !  
does the name of Rām exist in your body ? '

SAME BYSTANDER :

O Hanumān, you Abode of Strength, is the name of the Lord Rām written even in your  
heart ?

CHANT 17 :

Hearing the speech, the Son of the Wind said,  
' Certainly Hari's noble name is in my body ! '

HANUMĀN :

Yes, the name of the supremely noble Lord must surely be in my body !

CHANT 18 :

Having spoken thus, the ape tore open his own heart.  
On every hair's breadth were the infinite names of the Lord.  
Seeing the name of Rām stamped everywhere,  
all became astonished at heart.  
There was a rain of flowers, shouts of ' Victory ! ' in the sky.  
Raghunāth looked at him with gracious glance.  
Hanumān's body became again hard as the thunderbolt.<sup>25</sup>  
At once the Lord rose up ;  
With his body atingle and tears in his eyes  
he took Hanumān to his heart.

<sup>25</sup> Hindī simile regards the thunderbolt as the ultimate in hardness, rather than in  
speed and force.

In costuming, each North Indian community follows its own fancies, guided only by a few generally shared conceptions.<sup>26</sup> One of these universal notions is that murky colors are appropriate for demonic beings. Everywhere, Rāvaṇa and his henchmen are seen in blue or black clothing. The faces of the lesser demons are blackened with soot. Rāvaṇa's ten-headedness is always somehow represented, but the patterns of headgear differ greatly from community to community. The general intention in designing the dress of Rāma is that he should be made to look like a king. But since the conceptions of royalty in the popular mind are vague, the results are various. In some towns Rāma wears a cogā. The costume worn in Mathurā is a richly embroidered red velvet coat reminiscent of an old style of Western court dress. Sītā wears her distinctive coronet, called a caṇḍrikā, and a nose pendant (bulāk) of pearl. The head-dress of Rāma, here as everywhere, is a high cylindrical crown of a type peculiar to himself. A white feather (turrā) is fixed at its forward peak, and at the very top there rises a spade-shaped crest called kirīṭ. Major protrusions from the right and left sides of the headgear are said to represent earrings (kuṇḍal). A tassel of strung pearls dangles from each of these ear ornaments. A halo (*tej*) is attached to the rear of the crown. The lower border of the crown is fringed with a string of pearls. The dots and lines of sandalwood paste which often ornament the face of the actor are without special meaning. The *tilak* worn in the middle of the forehead by Mathurā actors is of the pattern peculiar to members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava or Rāmānuja Sampradāya.

There is great local variation in stage design. No single structure or layout can be called the Rāmlīlā stage. Since audiences sit upon mats on the ground, performances remain passably visible even when the stage is only a rectangle of earth under the open sky; therefore communities sometimes do not trouble to put up any sort of erected stage. When elevated and covered platforms are built, their function is not always to provide a central floor for the action. They may represent specific fortresses, palaces, or other buildings that serve only occasionally as the scene of some part of the panoramic action. It is a widely recognized principle of staging that, whenever a change of geographical setting occurs in the story of the Rāmāyaṇa, the scene of acting must undergo a complete shift to indicate the change of place. At such times, a move is made to a new arena, usually in another part of the town. The Mathurā players perform during their season in six different localities within their city. The events set in Ayodhyā and Janakpur are enacted on a

<sup>26</sup> Directions for costuming are given in Jvālāprasād Miśra, *Śrī Rāmlīlā Rāmāyaṇa Saṅgīhā*, pp. 24–28; and in Tripāthī, pp. 174 ff. Actors in costume are pictured in Sir William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, pp. 135, 137, 193, 195 f.



stage erected in a large open-air grain market in the heart of the Mathurā business district. The heaven of Viṣṇu to which the gods go to plead for help against Rāvaṇa is set up in a nearby bazaar. Viśvāmitra's hermitage is identified with the grounds of a local temple. A landing place on a bank of the Jamunā River becomes Prayāg, where Rāma's famous dialogue with Kevaṭa the ferryman is re-enacted. Citrakūṭ has yet another location, and the jungle scenes another. At most of these places much labor is expended in preparing special facilities for players and spectators. In Vṛindāban some years ago, a group of young men gained control of the Rāmlīlā who were convinced that their audiences had no real need for such literal and costly representation of the various localities of the Rāmāyaṇa. Defying the convention of the shifting stage, they began a tradition of holding performances night after night in a single arena on the grounds of the Temple of Raṅgījī. They give token recognition to the older principle, however, by enacting their various scenes now at one end, now at another, of the long strip of grass that is their stage.

In providing whole new theaters at each major change of scene, the Rāmlīlā is lavish, but it is economical in its use of scenery and stage properties. Excepting a solitary throne in palace scenes, the stages are practically bare. Because they are bare, they are extremely adaptable. If the plays are currently running in the spot designated as Ayodhyā, the stage can, with trifling changes or none in stage equipment, represent any and every part of Ayodhyā. When, soon afterward, another stage comes into use in the jungle scenes, it serves as the setting for every action said to have taken place in a thousand miles of territory. One of its borders represents the site of Rāma's peninsular headquarters, and the other side, twenty feet away, includes the seat of Rāvaṇa in the throne room of his palace in Ceylon.

This imaginative way of interpreting and using the stage area manifested itself in facilities of quite different appearance in the three cities of the author's direct observation.

In the town of Hāthras a great pavilion had been erected, accommodating on its broad earthen floor not only the actors involved in the battle for Laṅkā but most of the audience as well. A low platform under the center of this canopy served as the field headquarters of Rāma. A smaller platform in a distant corner represented the fortress of Laṅkā. Throughout the performance it was the place of Sītā's imprisonment and the roosting place of Rāvaṇa and his demon henchmen. A corridor between these two centers was kept clear of spectators, and up and down its length the war between the factions raged.

In Mathurā the spectators sat upon mats under the open sky; but, for the protection of the actors, raised stages with roof and side walls of cloth were built on a framework of heavy bamboo poles. The floor space was divided

by partitions into three fairly equal sections. At the rear was a large dressing room, sufficient to contain the great number of actors required by the dramas. The forestage was open, without curtains of any kind. The middle section was separated from the forestage by a filmy gauze curtain or scrim. When unlighted, its reaches were invisible to the audience, and were used as a waiting-room by actors about to go on stage. But when illuminated, its interior suddenly became fully visible. It was used then as a stage-within-a-stage for the representation of visions, dreams, or reveries. The frontmost section of the stage was the principal scene of action. Although the space available for movement there was vast, it always shrank steadily during an evening's performance because of the creeping encroachment on it of children and the deferential seating of dignitaries along its borders. On this stage, too, particular sides or corners were made to represent particular Rāmāyaṇa localities. Rāvaṇa's stronghold was at center rear, and there he usually squatted with his sooty crew about him, even when not participating in the current action of the play. Rāma and his chiefs formed a continuing cluster likewise, just off the center of the forestage. Throughout the Laṅkā scenes, these two parties confronted each other thus, across a stage floor on which envoys went hither and thither and across which the respective champions made their raids and fought their personal combats.

The staging arrangements in Vṛindāban were analogous but not at all similar superficially. The field of action was an avenue of beaten grass and earth, some forty yards long and twenty wide. On one side of it sat and stood the adult male spectators; on the other, sat the women and children. There was a roofed platform at the north end of this lawn, but it did not serve the purposes of a true stage. The deities sat in its shelter in formal pose to receive worship at the opening and close of each evening's performance. During the conflicts of Rāma with Rāvaṇa it served as headquarters and rallying-place for Rāma's forces. A low and roofless platform at the south end of the avenue was Rāvaṇa's citadel and the principal den of his demons. The action of the play moved up and down on the no-man's-land between. To present the story of an embassy or a foray, there was no need to replace painted jungle scenery with canvas battlements, for all localities involved in the epic narrative were continuously before the eyes of the spectators.

Let us observe how this outdoor stage was used on the evening of October 11, 1949. The portions of the *Rāmcaritmānas* which were to be enacted included the accounts of Rām's battle with Kumbhkarāṇ and of Lakshmaṇ's victory over Meghnād. These episodes were performed in tumultuous action. No recording machine could have caught all the dialogue, nor would the dialogue, if recorded, provide an adequate account of the presentation. Some scenes were almost pure motion, few words being heard save the occasional

narrative chant of the paṇḍit. But if a recording had been possible, it would have shown some prose dialogue among the recited verses as in the text already presented.

The first stirrings of activity on this Rāmlīlā stage begin at nine o'clock in the evening. Paṇḍit Kundanlāl arrives on the stroke of the hour, deposits his harmonium on the reader's table at the margin of the reserved area, and confers with his accompanists, who are to handle the cymbals and drum. Rām and Lakshmaṇ in full regalia now enter the stage at north and seat themselves with quiet dignity on a dais. An āratī tray with flaming wicks is brought out and waved gently up and down in a circular motion in the air before them. A second attendant unwraps a large copy of the *Rāmcārīt-mānas* ceremoniously, rotates it over the flame, and carries it to the paṇḍit's reading stand. Hanumān, who has been attending on the deities, now bounds down from the stage and leads the spectators in a shout of *Rāmcandra jī kī jay*. At 9 : 20 the paṇḍit raises his voice in chant, and with this act the drama proper begins.

The previous night's performance had ended with Lakshmaṇ's recovery from a grievous wound inflicted by Meghnād's magic weapon, the śakti. Now Lakshmaṇ's renewed fighting power again threatens the demons. Rāvaṇ, worried, is seen leaving his dark southern fortress to call to his aid his monstrous brother Kumbhkaraṇ ('Pot-ears'). That massive demon has been sleeping—a shapeless heap—on a rope bed in the middle of the field. We can hear as well as see his slumbers. Kumbhkaraṇ had eaten such a gluttonous meal six months before that for half a year he has been sunk in sleep. The counterpane pitches and quivers with each inhalation of his mountainous paunch. The blare of his hoarse snores reaches the farthest spectator.

Rāvaṇ prods him, without response. Rāvaṇ pleads his desperate need of help. Pot-ears hears nothing. The demon king calls from his capital a host of minor imps and orders them to wake his brother. The average age of these apprentice demons is perhaps nine or ten. Their whole equipment is a soot-smeared face, a blue-black shirt well-fouled with dust, and an exuberant willingness to attempt any mischievous assignment. The clowning spirit in which the demons carry out their diabolic responsibilities is striking. In this day and age the goblins of old are taken lightly on the stage and even take themselves lightly. The imps swarm upon Kumbhkaraṇ—sit on his neck, clamber to the top of his abdominal hump, jump up and down on his paunch and shriek. Kumbhkaraṇ belches, shrugs them off. They climb on again. His belches become awakening grunts. He sits up and roars. Rāvaṇ tries to explain to him the current peril to the demon cause. Kumbhkaraṇ's mind is preoccupied with ordering breakfast: a herd of roasted buffalo and a million bottles of wine. The imps lug in huge baskets of victuals. Like



stokers, they throw food with shovels into the monster's greedy maw—all the while stuffing themselves as well. His mouth is too full to speak clearly, but Kumbhkaraṇ keeps bellowing for more. In his greedy appetites and loud voice, Kumbhkaraṇ personifies the qualities which Hindu feeling looks upon as the nadir of breeding and virtue.

Finally, bloated with food and heated with wine, Kumbhkaraṇ picks up his ungainly body and lurches off toward the wars. As demon general, he musters an untidy army from among the imps. He drills his disorderly squads by bawling in corrupt English, 'rāṭ, leyaṭ, rāṭ, leyaṭ . . . hāṭ!' To salute, the demons assume a squatting posture, pinch their noses shut, and thumb them at their commander. They prostrate themselves and wriggle in the dust. Now the whole body rises and charges off uncertainly in the direction of Rām's camp in a formation about as military as the snake dance at a high school football rally.

In mid-field, Kumbhkaraṇ meets his brother Vibhīṣaṇ, who has abandoned his evil kin to espouse the cause of Rām. The fate-driven brothers pause to take final leave of each other. Vibhīṣaṇ then breaks away to warn Rām of Kumbhkaraṇ's impending attack. Rām gives the alarm to a host of juveniles who have been swarming about him in the red jackets of his monkey allies. His signal stirs them up beyond even their usual level of agitation. They pour down upon the field. Ununiformed irregulars join in from nearby rows of young spectators. Rām's motley host rolls out, collides with the horde of Kumbhkaraṇ, and both dissolve in dust. The rival groups of little boys catch hold of each other's shirt-tails and pull and push each other down into the dirt in the best of spirits. A group of agile 'monkeys' begins to tease Kumbhkaraṇ. He lunges at them, vainly, again and again. With threatening roars, he pulls up a 'tree' (a branch planted upright in the ground for the purpose). Swinging the branch about his head menacingly, he sweeps the young apes back before him to their camp.

Rām leaps down from the platform to succor his fleeing allies, twanging the string of his bow. The soldiers of the demon army see him and turn tail, leaving Kumbhkaraṇ to face Rām alone. A protracted duel begins between the two champions. The combatants circle each other to the measured rhythm of the paṇḍit's continuous scriptural recitation. The whirling steps and the stylized brandishing of weapons give the battle the semblance of a dance. Rām discharges light reed arrows which drop at his opponent's feet or flutter in the air above. At last the two come to close quarters. Kumbhkaraṇ goes down heavily. Wails go up from the demon camp, and from the crowd there rises a shout of '*Rāmcandra jī kī jay!*'

Meghnād, son of Rāvaṇ, rises from among the demon cluster now, a picture of vengeful wrath. Standing on the edge of the southern platform and waving



a scimitar, he makes a vaunting speech in a *rākshasa* tongue that sounds very much like Urdu. Then he rushes forth and falls upon the dark-gowned actor who plays the role of Rām's ally, the bear Jāmbavān. They grapple. The bear throws Meghnād down and pins him to the earth for a moment, but he breaks free and returns, shaken, to his base. Next Meghnād tries to gain supernatural power by performing a Vedic-type sacrifice. He and his urchins fix their black pennant in the ground, build a fire, and seat themselves around it. A ritual chant goes up from them in the cadence of Vedic recitation, but their language is a jabberwocky, a demon's pseudo-Sanskrit which brings roars of laughter from the crowd. At the other end of the field Vibhīṣaṇ warns Rām that the sacrifice, if completed, will make Meghnād almost invincible. Rām sends forth his monkeys to interrupt the rite. The monkeys swirl around the group of sacrificers, at first keeping a respectful distance. The busy demons take no notice of them. The monkeys grow bold; they swarm in, kick the demons' backs and pull their hair. They badger Meghnād to such a fury that he breaks away from the fire to pursue them. Thereby his sacrifice is spoiled. Rām requests Lakshmaṇ now to put an end to Meghnād altogether. As Meghnād is pursuing the monkeys up and down the field, Lakshmaṇ stops him short. The two join in dancelike combat, and Meghnād falls under Lakshmaṇ's arrows.

The last scene of the evening showed the suttee of the faithful Sulocanā. The day's events ended at midnight with the usual flame-worship of the impersonated deities.

The Rāmlīlā is produced under the supervision of a committee elected by an annual meeting of all the Rāmlīlā enthusiasts of a locality. The committee raises and spends the budget, marshalls the public processions, and exercises a power of final decision in every matter connected with the observances. The supervisory bodies of all communities are much alike in structure and function, but they bear a variety of names. The promoting body in Satnā was known by the English title, the Ram Lila Committee. The dramas in Hāthras are publicized as the activities of the *Sārvaajanik Dhārmik Sabhā*, the Public Religious Society; and in Vṛindāban the publications of the association appear under the name of the *Śrī Pañcāyatī Rāmlīlā Kameṭī*, the Public Rāmlīlā Committee. Bhīm Tāl in the Himālayas, atypical in many ways, has superimposed upon its managing committee a *Pradhān Sabhā* made up of local dignitaries, who make appointments, audit accounts, and exercise general supervision.<sup>27</sup> The general public and even the officials of the

<sup>27</sup> Rāmdatt Jyotirvid, appendix, p. 3. The chairman of the Pradhān Sabhā in 1906-09 was a European.

organizations themselves use these names casually, substituting equivalents freely in speech and in print.

It is established that a town ought to have one Rāmlilā celebration only, conducted under the auspices of a group representing the united Hindu community. Though this ideal is recognized, it is often honored in the breach. Banāras has long had at least three bands of performers at work during the daśahrā season. Any group of malcontents or enthusiasts are conceded the right to organize in their own ward of a town an independent performance and to compete through it for the pre-eminence. If they prove clever in assembling talent and funds, they may eventually win the position of the recognized Rāmlilā of the place. The memory of the older residents of Vṛindāban is long enough to record the decline of several Rāmlilā organizations and the rise of others to the prime position. Though rivalries of this kind are found frequently enough, the normal situation in any town is that one group of players either has the field entirely to itself or surpasses all others so decisively that it is recognized without question as *the* Rāmlilā society of the city.

In Vṛindāban at the present time such pre-eminence belongs to the performers who meet at the Temple of Raṅgī (Śrī Raṅganātha). The *Śrī Pañcāyatī Rāmlilā Kameṭī* of Vṛindāban was organized about sixty years ago when the Temple of Raṅgī, then still relatively new, first attracted to itself a group of Rāmlilā players. The temple authorities provide a room for the committee's meetings and for the storage of its equipment, but neither the priests nor the temple manager exert any special influence in the society's affairs. The managing committee has a membership of about twelve, half of whom are businessmen, and the other half, brahmans engaged in professional religious duties of one kind or another. Several members are college graduates.

This committee, like others of its kind elsewhere, is responsible eventually to the subscribers who provide the funds. In August of each year, about thirty days before the performances are to begin, the committee of the previous season sends messengers through the city to announce by beat of drum the annual meeting of the full society. The voting membership at this gathering consists of those present who made contributions toward the expenses of the Rāmlilā of the year before. The informal proceedings are not governed by a written constitution or rules of order. The agenda seldom includes decisions on the detailed manner of performing the dramas, because such matters are rather completely fixed by local custom. The most important work of the evening is the election of new members to fill vacancies in the managing committee, and the launching of the financial campaign. The old committee proposes for the meeting's approval a list of new co-workers. One criterion in the selection of new members is their enthusiasm and capacity for organizational work. But a second qualification, at least as important, is

ability to help in one way or another in raising funds, for the most essential function of the managing committee is to meet the expenses of producing the plays and spectacles. The meeting draws up a list of authorized solicitors. The committee members themselves form the core of the money-raising staff.

During the month's interval between this general meeting and the beginning of the performances, the canvassers scour the city, receipt book in hand, asking contributions from the head of every family of any substance. The extent to which the Rāmlīlā is a folk affair is indicated by the published financial reports of the committees of Vṛindāban and Mathurā.<sup>28</sup> The Vṛindāban committee raised Rs 891 in 1946. Rs 727 of this came from 613 contributors, most of whom gave one rupee. The largest single sum was a grant of forty rupees from the municipal government. The names of 183 of the donors were plainly brahman; 164 were recognizable as those of persons of the merchant class; three were Muslim names. The remaining 20 per cent of the budget was obtained from the public largely through offerings given on certain ritual occasions connected with the spectacles themselves. When the *Bharatmilāp* procession is making its leisurely passage through the city, shopkeepers along the way invite the impersonators of the deities into their shops and offer refreshments and small gifts of money. And when each night's drama comes to a close with the āratī worship of the enthroned deities, many devout onlookers press up to the stage, pass their fingers over the flame of the lamp, and drop a coin into the tray on which it rests. The final evening of the series, the night of the coronation of Rāma, is an occasion when it is the duty of all those who have attended throughout the season to come forward at the time of the āratī and present a special gift. This is an obligation recognized and felt by all. The finance drive is the opportunity for those affluent enough to give in rupees; the āratīs are occasions for those who can give only in coppers. Managing committees often suffer acute anxieties about falling into debt. 'Rāmlīlā', a short story by Premcand, deals with the struggle of a managing committee to balance its budget.<sup>29</sup>

The report of the Mathurā committee for 1946 was signed by twelve members, seven of whom were merchants, three were paṇḍits, one a teacher, and one a doctor. The total budget of Rs 4,151 reflected Mathurā's greater population and wealth, but the sources of income were much the same. A total of Rs 3,572 was contributed by 740 donors. More than a hundred subscribers gave Rs 10 each or more, but once again the treasury was filled mainly through contributions of one or two rupees. The municipal government made no

<sup>28</sup> The reports, issued by Rādhāgovind Tēntīvālā and by Keśavdev, are detailed in note 5 above.

<sup>29</sup> Premcand, *Galpa-Ratna* (Banāras Cantonment, Sarasvatī Press, 1948), 'Rāmlīlā', pp. 69–76. Cf. Rāmdatt Jyotirvid's account of a struggle with debt, appendix, pp. 2 f.



direct cash grant but paid a bill for special street lighting amounting to Rs 94. In addition, the public works department of the city made available the services of a gang of its laborers to move equipment about and keep the grounds clean. A corps of boy volunteers contributed personal service in maintaining order and directing the crowds at the performances. A club of Rāmāyaṇa enthusiasts called the *Rāmāyaṇa Pracāriṇī Sabhā* usually takes some special responsibility for the costumes of the actors. Generally speaking, it is the middle classes of these cities which furnish the most support to the Rāmlīlā and fill the ranks of its managing committees. Nevertheless, its financial burden is widely distributed among hundreds of people. No individual or clique is in a position to control it through financial patronage. It would be hard to find any activity which expresses more directly the ideals and tastes of the entire Hindu public of a North Indian town.

One of the responsibilities of a Rāmlīlā committee is to decide when the series of dramas shall begin, and for how many days it shall continue. To try to discern the principles by which the committees are guided is a puzzling study. It has been possible to collate information on the calendars of sixty-three communities, that is, the four small cities of Braj mentioned before, and fifty-nine other places whose calendar, as listed in the *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*,<sup>30</sup> makes clear reference to the existence of a local Rāmlīlā in the daśahrā season and specifies the dates on which it customarily started and ended. The information of the gazetteers is more than sixty years old, but it includes data on the observances of a great many small towns and villages and is still valuable as a corrective for the impression made by the elaborate celebrations of modern cities. The duration of the Rāmlīlā in these sixty-three places ranges all the way from nine to thirty-one days. In our four cities of Braj, long runs of eighteen to twenty-six days prevailed, but the places, large and small, listed in the gazetteers showed an average run of only ten or eleven. Our conclusion is that a nine-day series of dramas is evidently considered a minimum, and that a Rāmlīlā committee may lengthen the season beyond nine days according to its financial means, the talent and interest of the people of the community, and the established custom of the place.

After deciding how many nights the dramas shall continue, the Rāmlīlā committee must set the dates on which they shall begin and end. In the sixty-three calendars studied, the one factor common to all was the nine-day period ending on the tenth day of the light fortnight of the month of Āśvin, the vijayādaśamī day or 'Triumphant Tenth' on which Rāma is said to have

<sup>30</sup> *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, eds. H. R. Neville and D. L. Drake-Brockman (48 vols., Allahabad, Government Press, 1904-11), vols. 1-2, 6-11, 14-36, 40, 42-44, 47-48.



slain Rāvaṇa and stormed his citadel. Furthermore, there seems to be an almost universal sense that the final defeat of Rāvaṇa should actually be staged on that day. Only the Vṛindāban players—ever unconventional—disregarded this rule by enacting Rāvaṇa's defeat eleven days later. In places where only a short series of nine or ten nights' performances is being put on, the story of victorious Rāma's happy return and ascension of the throne is abbreviated and included in the performance on vijayādaśamī, and with that day the whole project terminates. Many towns which can afford to be more leisurely continue for two more days—not by shifting the Rāvaṇavadh from its customary date, but by devoting a separate evening to Rāma's reunion with his brother (the Bharatmilāp) and another to the coronation scenes. A few even add two further sessions, featuring first Rāma's farewell to the monkeys, and then a concluding benedictory ritual. The generalizations about the Rāmlīlā calendar which will stand are as follows: the dramas are held on dates which are sure to include Āśvin śukla from the second through the tenth; the killing of Rāvaṇa is almost universally enacted on the tenth; and the communities may, with perfect conventionality, add three or four days of drama after the tenth and begin as many days before the second as they like.

The managing committee does not usually take direct responsibility for rehearsals and stage management. They take an active part in recruiting actors, but find it wise to delegate their training and supervision to persons having special practical skill. These directors are usually men who, in their younger days, acted in the Rāmlīlā themselves. In Vṛindāban, Paṇḍit Puru-shottam, the priest of a local temple, coaches the young actors in the dialogues which are traditional in that town. Allowing them some liberty in formulating their prose speeches, he drills them with strictness in the exact recitation of the occasional verse components of their parts. The teaching function is carried out in Mathurā by a trio which includes a sādhu named Bhadra Bābājī, a professional paṇḍit named Govindjī Caube, and a jeweler named Gīrrājmal who knows the entire series of plays by heart and whose special task is to sit beside the stage during rehearsals and call to account any actor who departs verbally from the dialogue sanctified by custom. The town of Satnā followed the unusual practice of bringing in from Ayodhyā for the season a professional director of the Rāmlīlā. Paid professional directors reside in Banāras also, where they bear the occupational title *Vyās*.

Considering the immensity of the material of the plays, rehearsal is taken lightly. Vṛindāban's director tutors his actors individually in their recitations and holds hardly any group rehearsals at all; consequently, the performances show the awkwardness arising from constant physical improvisation. Rehearsals begin in Mathurā two or three weeks before the opening night. Every third

year or so, when new actors must be trained for the major roles, practice begins a little earlier. Training in bodily movement is not entirely neglected in Mathurā, but the generalization still holds that the Rāmlīlā emphasizes facility in verbal expression and views stage deportment as a minor matter.

To undertake an aesthetic evaluation of the Rāmlīlā is to attempt to judge the standards and tastes of the North Indian masses. Not many of the performances are filled with such heroics and buffoonery as the farcical struggle with pot-ears, nor is the intense emotional piety of our earlier recorded text to be taken as representing the single mood of the Rāmlīlā. The mixture of piety and lightheartedness together gives it its tone. It grips its audience of thousands because the community as a whole is its producer and to some extent its playwright; it is the mirror of traditional folk interests and ideals. Seasoning the episodes with humor and feeling, the actors go through the old stories playing upon one popular emotion after another, such as the delight in children, the love of weddings, the sympathy for separated lovers, admiration for the obedient son and loyal wife, delight in the grotesque, feeling for animals, and adoration of the fearless hero. The affectionate piety of Tulsīdās suffuses both play and audience. Through Tulsī's influence also, obscenity is not among the Rāmlīlā's concessions to the popular mind. Nothing indecent is even hinted at. It is as true of the dramas as of the scripture on which they are based that 'here are no prurient and seductive stories like snails, frogs and scum on the water, and therefore the lustful crow and greedy crane, if they do come, are disappointed'.<sup>31</sup> From Tulsī, too, comes the ethereal but earnest moral idealism of the Rāmlīlā's ingenuous tale of a clear-cut struggle between good and evil.

Of the Rāmlīlā's technical sophistication, Niehus says it is 'the theatre in its baby-shoes'—and with some cause. It moves on amidst a degree of confusion that many outsiders would regard as intolerable. Spectators are allowed to invade the dressing room and even the stage. Onlookers, when momentarily tired of the play, chatter among themselves without inhibition. The paintings daubed on the cloth partitions of the stages are far less effective than pictures of the pure imagination. By external standards, the emotion of pathos is often indulged to excess. Since the project is too massive to be brought to perfection in the time given to rehearsal, the stage action lumbers on jerkily. The physical movements of the actors are usually somewhat stiff and underexpressed, showing little of the Indian dancer's facility in translating meaning into felicitous motion. The performers themselves measure their accomplishment in terms of quality of declamation, and this, as the author has heard it, has been very well done indeed. With only the slightest trace

<sup>31</sup> Growse, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsī Dās*, p. 31.

of a singsong, the actors spoke with a clarity, poise, feeling, and volume that would be highly creditable anywhere, especially in teen-age actors. The artistic level of the Rāmlīlā reflects the fact that it is an amateur and popular institution, but sometimes at least it rises to excellence.

We turn now from aesthetic to social appraisal. How important is the Rāmlīlā as an instrument of Hindu cultural education? A mere summary opinion on so general a question would be neither instructive nor convincing. Let us break the inquiry down into questions that can be answered somewhat objectively. How deep an impression do the dramas make upon those who attend them? How much of the population of an average community goes to see them? How thickly distributed are the centers in which the Rāmlīlā is performed? How extensive is the area in which it prevails?

Only the question of the power of the Rāmlīlā to hold and move its audience will have to be dealt with on the basis of personal impression. The performances observed by the author seemed to be, beyond doubt, highly successful as devices for the communication of the mythology and moral teaching of Hinduism. Their effectiveness could be perceived directly in the intentness of the faces of the row upon row of wide-eyed children who nightly packed the performances. Boys and girls absorb at the Rāmlīlā, for several weeks annually, a précis of the Rāmāyaṇa with a most vivid and intelligible commentary. A considerable body of lore is fixed permanently on the memory of any person who sits through the Rāmlīlā even two or three times in the course of his life. The familiarity with the Rāmāyaṇa that is characteristic of the common people of North India cannot be explained as arising from reading alone because the majority cannot read. If the Rāmlīlā is shown to be widespread in its occurrence in North India, it will have to be regarded as important in conveying this knowledge. To this personal judgment we may add the testimony of the beloved poet Hariścandra of Banāras, 'the Father of Hindī literature', in a verse entitled 'Śrī Rām Līlā':

Hari's līlā is a giver of happiness in every way.

Through speaking, hearing, and seeing, it enters the heart and increases devotion.

Love grows, sin flees, love of virtue springs up in the heart.

That is why Haricand listens daily and applauds the deeds of Hari.<sup>32</sup>

Pending a demonstration that the Rāmlīlā is an institution of some age, we may credit it with having helped preserve the continuity of Hindu political

<sup>32</sup> [Bhāratendu] Hariścandra of Banāras, *Bhāratendu Granthāvalī*, ed. Brajratna Dās (Banāras, Kāśī Nāgarī-pracārīṇī Sabhā, saṃvat 1991 [A.D. 1934]), No. 61, 'Śrī Rām Līlā', p. 770:

hari-līlā sab bidhi sukh-dāi.

kahat sunat dekhat jiy ānat det bhagati adhikāi.

prem baṛhat agh nasat punya-rati jiy main upajāt āi.

yāhī soṇ haricand karat suni nit hari-carit baṛāi.



aspiration. In the region of the Rāmlilā, it is the most universally accepted and the most widely attended of Hindu festivals, having an appeal as non-sectarian as that of the Rāmāyaṇa. While all eyes focus on the great culminating spectacles of the Rāmlilā—the return of the victorious Rāma to his kingdom, his ascension of the throne, his acceptance of the fealty of his rejoicing subjects, and his making of arrangements for a utopian reign—the attention of the Hindu community is united as at no other time. Although the participants have not generally felt any conflict between their devotion to King Rāma and their allegiance to Mughal or British monarchs, there was political significance, nevertheless, in the rare unity shown on these occasions, in the specific content of certain of the pageants, and in the intense self-identification of the Hindu onlooker with them. When the Hindu citizens of a town at the time of the Bharatmilāp flocked in thousands to the edge of their city to join with Bharata in welcoming the returning Rāma, they were not turning out as mere spectators to see actors perform in a play. According to a prime doctrinal assumption of the Vaishṇava stage, they were thronging to welcome the god-king himself, incarnated temporarily in the body of an actor. And they themselves who hailed him as he passed in procession had a role to play: For the moment they were not a part of a Muslim or Britannic empire but subjects of King Rāma and citizens of his capital, Ayodhyā the Unassailable. Robert Needham Cust perceived the subtle relation between the Rāmlilā and national feeling in a striking comment on the excitements of the pageantry in Banāras more than a century ago:

More wondrous is it, when we consider, that it is a people, who have naught of real nationality, who know not even the name of patriotism, who have bowed for centuries abjectly to any conqueror whom chance might place over them; who are incapable of unity for their own advantage; yet on this one occasion they raise the cry of victory, though defeated; display unity of action, though hopelessly dissevered; and might pass for patriots, did we not know they were not so.<sup>33</sup>

From today's vantage ground we may add that the appearance of patriotism was not entirely an illusion. A seed of patriotic feeling was being guarded in this institution like a spark in ashes. As a mere spark it had no political force, but it was a spark which Mahātmā Gāndhī was to blow into open flame one day by speaking to the simple folk of restoring *Rāmrāj*, the happy rule of Rāma. They could respond to this ideal because it was not new to them. It was one of the few vital indigenous political ideas remaining in the vastly unpolitical mind of the old-time Indian peasant. Through centuries of foreign rule the Rāmlilā helped preserve a basis for civic resurrection. It must be considered in the history of Indian nationalism.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Needham Cust, *Pictures of Indian Life, Sketched with the Pen from 1852 to 1881* (London, Trübner & Co., 1881), pp. 36 f.



We have ventured to speak of a possible general influence of the Rāmlīlā before ascertaining how widely it prevails in India. How far the observance extends beyond the boundaries of Uttar Pradesh can be determined roughly by examining a sea of literature on the holiday customs of many places.<sup>34</sup> The Rāmlīlā is well-known in Bihar and the East Panjab and deep into Madhya Pradesh. It has been reported as far south as Nāgpur, but our material indicates that in Berar's Marathi-speaking country the enactment of Rāma's deeds takes place during ten days of April, uses a different technique, and no doubt has a different literary basis. The Rāmlīlā has not been found in descriptions of the daśahrā observances of Mysore, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bengal, or Nepal. It was introduced into the districts of Almorā and Nainī Tāl only toward the end of the last century. Performances have been noted in such distant places as Calcutta, Lahore and Śrīnagar, but they seem to be carried on there by groups of *émigrés* from Uttar Pradesh. During September and October, then, the Rāmlīlā country is like a great central island in a sea of Devī worship. In general, its geographical home is that area in which

<sup>34</sup> The geographical limits of the Rāmlīlā have been defined mainly from the following literature. General: M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year* (Calcutta, Association Press, 1921), pp. 53–57; William C. Crooke, 'The Dasahra: An Autumn Festival of the Hindus,' *Folk-lore*, 26 (1915), 28–59; E. Denison Ross, *An Alphabetical List of the Feasts and Holidays of the Hindus and Muhammadans* (Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Printing, 1914), pp. 16, 66. Nepal: Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal*, 2, 54 ff.; Henry Ambrose Oldfield, *Sketches from Nipāl* (2 vols., London, W. H. Allen & Co., 1880), 2, 342 ff. Kumaon and Garhwal: Rāmdatt Jyotirvid, p. 3, appendix, p. 1; Paṇḍit Pitāmbar Tripāthī. Panjab: Oman; Richard Carnac Temple in *Indian Antiquary*, 10 (1881), 289 f. The literary basis of the Rāmlīlā in the Panjab is not clear. Kashmir: Suniti Kumar Chatterji, ed., *Indian Drama* (New Delhi, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1956), p. 70; Florence H. Morden, 'House-boat Days in the Vale of Kashmir,' *National Geographic Magazine*, 56 (Oct. 1929), 451, illus. Rajasthan: Louis Rousselet, *India and Its Native Princes* (New York, Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876), pp. 258 f.; Balkrishṇa Atmarām Gupte, *Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials*, pp. 185–88. Gujarat: Rousselet, pp. 114 f.; Alexander Kinloch Forbes, *Rās Mālā* (2 vols., London, Oxford University Press, 1924), 2, 331 f.; N. A. Thoothi, *The Vaishnavas of Gujarāt* (Calcutta, Longmans, Green & Co., 1935), pp. 286–89, is a superior sketch without clear place reference. Mahārāshtra: Lucia C. G. Grieve, 'The Dasara Festival at Satara, India,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 30 (1910), 72–76; S. S. Mehta, 'The Dassera and Daśaratha Līlā Proceeding from It as a Festive Occasion,' *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, 10 (1913–16), Part 3, 187–96; Ridgeway, quoting D. R. Bhandarkar, pp. 184, 190; *The Bombay Calendar and General Directory for the Year 1847* (Bombay, Jeejeebhoy Byramjee, 1847), pp. 56 f. Madras: R. K., 'The Dasara: The Great Autumnal Festival,' *The Light of Truth, or the Siddhanta Dipika*, 12 (1911), pp. 214–17. Mysore: L. N. Gubil, 'The Dasara at Mysore,' *Modern Review*, 72 (Oct. 1942), pp. 314–17. Berar: *Panjab Notes and Queries*, 3 (1886), sec. 674; Śrī Purohit Swāmī, *An Indian Monk* (London, Macmillan & Co., 1932), pp. 17 f. Nāgpūr: Ridgeway, quoting Paṇḍit Hira Lal, pp. 204 f. Bengal: Oman, p. 85, 'the Bengalees do not perform the Ram Lila.' Jacquemont, I, 220, notes that the participants 'come almost all from the Upper Provinces . . .'; Padmina Sen Gupta, 'Puja in the Bustees,' *The Statesman*, Calcutta, Puja Supplement (Sept. 25, 1949), p. 2. Fiji: C. F. Andrews, 'Indian Labour in Fiji,' *Modern Review*, 23 (June 1918), 587. Ceylon has a Rāmāyaṇa festival drama in Tamil which is similar to the Rāmlīlā in some ways: Hugh Neville, 'The Ramayana as a Play,' *The Taprobanian*, 2 (1887), 150–60, 170–72; Carl Hagemann, *Spiele der Voelker* (Berlin, Schuster and Loeffler, 1919), pp. 50–57.

Hindī is an everyday language and the *Rāmcaritmānas* can be made understandable without great difficulty.

How intensively the Rāmlīlā has permeated Uttar Pradesh itself can be judged from the data on festivals given in the district gazetteers, which name 321 towns as celebrating the daśahrā holidays with Rāmlīlā. A very great number of other towns are said merely to celebrate 'daśahrā', with no indication of whether Rāma or Durgā is honored. Sixty years ago, some kind of Rāmlīlā was staged by many more than 321 towns—how many more, we cannot tell. We venture the opinion that there must have been few North Indian villagers in the first half of the twentieth century who did not live within an evening's walking distance of a Rāmlīlā during the daśahrā season. We do not know whether the observance is increasing or declining today. Oscar Lewis has described a village in Delhi State, where in 1958 the Rāmlīlā had not been held for a dozen years or more and where the younger villagers did not know the story of the Rāmāyaṇa and could not identify its characters.<sup>35</sup> His data show only that under present conditions Rāmāyaṇa knowledge and the Rāmlīlā rise or fall together.

If one were to measure participation by attendance at the outdoor pageants, one would have to make a very high estimate. Great crowds of 20,000 to 100,000 thronged to these displays in Mathurā, and Balwant Gargi tells us of a crowd of 300,000 deeply-moved people who attend the Bharatmilāp pageant annually at Nāṭī Imlī in Banāras.<sup>36</sup> However, the impact of the Rāmlīlā is profound only in the daily recitation dramas, and we must base our evaluation on attendance at them. At Mathurā, by rough count of the author and others, these plays drew crowds that averaged not less than 2,500 people. About three percent of the populations of Mathurā and Vṛindāban turned out nightly. These relatively large attendances seem to be representative of attendance throughout North India. Though the two Braj towns are tīrthas and are filled with people who may be supposed to have an unusual interest in religious drama, this fact is partly offset by the fewness of local Rāma shrines and the intense preference of the residents for the worship of Kṛishṇa. The district gazetteers of Uttar Pradesh suggest high attendance elsewhere in the province also, and Morris Opler, in surveying the degree of participation in religious observances in an eastern U.P. village, says: 'Members of every household interviewed had attended one or more sessions of the religious pageant, the Ram Lila.'<sup>37</sup> The Uttar Pradesh gazetteers give estimates of

<sup>35</sup> Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 236.

<sup>36</sup> Gargi, *Folk Theater of India*, p. 104.

<sup>37</sup> Morris Edward Opler, 'The Place of Religion in a North Indian Village', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 1959), p. 222.

Rāmlīlā attendance for 308 towns, the average of which is 3,525 persons. Some of the reporting officials had in mind attendance at the field pageants—the fact is betrayed by their occasional submission of figures well over 100,000. The intrusion of such estimates into our lists has inflated the average of 3,525 considerably. We must discount it a great deal in order to form any true notion of attendance at the plays. Even if we should judge that the average Rāmlīlā audience numbers *less* than 2,500, we must still see the Rāmlīlā as far exceeding the outreach of any live drama of the West, and as a very powerful influence indeed.







5

## THE ORIGIN OF THE RĀMLĪLĀ

How old is the Rāmlīlā tradition? The more remotely it can be traced, the more justice there is in attributing to it a significant role in the transmission of Hindu culture in North India. When Niehus asked how long it had gone on in Ghāzīpur, he was told only, 'Since very ancient times', i.e. since a time beyond local memory. The Rāmlīlā societies of Mathurā and Vṛindāban have no records or traditions about the beginnings of the Rāmlīlā in those towns. The famous Rāmnagar performances are traced by Balwant Gargi only to about the year 1840. However we know through Jacquemont, Prinsep, and Heber, that the festival was a well-established institution in Barrackpore, Banāras, and Allāhābād in the 1820's. Prinsep remarks, 'There is no trace of the representation having been in practice earlier than a century and a half ago, in the city of Benares.' This may mean that he had seen some evidence that it was performed in Banāras as early as A.D. 1675, but we cannot be sure.

North India has one positive tradition regarding the origin of the Rāmlīlā. It attributes its founding, in its present form, to a disciple of Tulsīdās about A.D. 1625. The author owes his information to the master of an Ayodhyān jhānkī troupe. When asked his opinion on the beginnings of the Rāmlīlā, the svāmī brought from his luggage a Hindī book by Sarjū Dāsji Ayodhyānivāsī entitled *Rāmkrishṇalīlānukaraṇ Siddhānt*,<sup>1</sup> from which he read aloud the first twenty pages. Here is the story unfolded therein:

Among the devoted disciples of Tulsīdās was a skilled temple architect whom the educated people knew as Nārāyaṇ Dās, but whom the common people called Meghārām or Meghā Bhagat. When, in A.D. 1623, Tulsī died, Meghā was inconsolable. In great grief he resorted to the temple of Saṅkaṭ

<sup>1</sup> Sarjū Dāsji Ayodhyānivāsī, *Rāmkrishṇalīlānukaraṇ Siddhānt* (Lucknow, Naval Kiśor Press, saṃvat 1976 [A.D. 1919]), pp. 3–20.

Mocan Hanumān in Banāras. He received in the sanctuary there a divine command to go and keep vigil in Ayodhyā, the ancient residence of Rāma. Meghā traveled obediently to that place and kept a night-long watch there on the bank of the sacred river Sarjū. As dawn was breaking, two handsome boys in hunting costume approached him, and one handed him his bow, asking him to keep it until his return. The day passed and night fell, and yet the boys did not return. At last Meghā fell asleep. Rāma came to him in a dream and informed him that it had been he himself and his brother Lakshmaṇa whom Meghā had seen in hunting clothes that morning. Meghā protested that it had been hardly fair of Rāma to come to him incognito, depriving him of all the joy of the blessed vision. Rāma replied that face-to-face interview with God is difficult in this Kali Age. For this very reason he wished Meghā to go to Banāras and start a custom there which would help devotees realize the divine presence. He instructed Meghā to go to a locality in Banāras known as Nāṭī Imlī and begin there the enactment of the Rāmlīlā using the Rāmāyaṇa written by his master, Tulsīdās. Rāma added the promise that on the day of the commemoration of his meeting with Bharata (the Bharatmilāp) Meghā would have a perfect darśana of his Lord.

Enlisting the aid of brahman boys of good family, Meghā produced the dramas at Nāṭī Imlī in the month of Āśvin amidst great popular acclaim. On the day of the Bharatmilāp, during the excitement of the reunion of the royal brothers, Meghā collapsed and died.

The performance of the Bharatmilāp at Nāṭī Imlī is famous throughout North India to the present day, and it is known for its power to bring to devotees a face-to-face vision of Rāma.<sup>2</sup> A letter of inquiry which the author sent to the venerable Paṇḍit Channu Datt Vyās, manager for many years of the performances at Nāṭī Imlī, brought a gracious reply in which he explained the origin of the performances there substantially as narrated in the book of Sarjū Dāsji Ayodhyānivāsī.

How much credence can we give this tale? Since the sources from which we have obtained it, both oral and written, are of the twentieth century, we can by no means claim that anything has been proved by it. Sarjū Dāsji gives no hint of what his sources may have been. It has been possible to find earlier sources of one element in it, namely, the divine instruction to keep a vigil in an isolated place, resulting in an unrecognized meeting with Rāma. This incident cannot have been an authentic part of a genuine account of the establishing of the Rāmlīlā by one Meghā Bhagat. It is to be discarded

<sup>2</sup> Munshi Hari Bhaksh, *Śrībhaktimāla arthāt Hari-bhaktiprakāśikā* (Bombay, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, 1884), pp. 244 f.

not because it is a marvel, but because it has been purloined from a long-established tradition about the life of Tulsīdās himself. It appears as early as A.D. 1712 in Priyā Dās' commentary on Nābhājī's *Bhaktamāl*.<sup>3</sup> Priyā Dās tells us that when Tulsī on one occasion obtained a boon from Hanumān, Tulsī asked that he might behold the beauty of Rāma face to face. Hanumān appointed a time and place for the meeting, and Tulsī went there and waited. While he was waiting, two horsemen came riding by in green hunting clothes, but Tulsī paid no attention to them. Hanumān came close behind saying, 'Tulsī, did you see your Lord?' Only then did Tulsī understand that he had seen Rāma and Lakshmaṇa with uncomprehending eyes.

The same story is found again in a prose commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* which was printed in 1827 in William Price's *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections*.<sup>4</sup> An expanded paraphrase of Priyā Dās, it adds the detail that Tulsī's meeting with the unrecognized deities took place at Citrakūṭ. Finally, Sir George Grierson in *The Indian Antiquary* for 1893 relates a version of the tale, which this time includes reference to a Rāmlīlā performance.<sup>5</sup> We are told that while Tulsī was waiting at Citrakūṭ for his promised meeting with Rāma, he strolled into the country and came upon what he believed to be a Rāmlīlā. He watched it with enjoyment, and on the homeward path he remarked to a brahman whom he met that he had seen an excellent Rāmlīlā. 'Are you mad, talking of Rāmlīlās at this time of year?' said the brahman—and Tulsī finally understood that Hanumān's promise had already been kept and that he had been looking upon the actual deities. That night Tulsī wept from shame and disappointment. Hanumān appeared to him in a vision and consoled him with the reminder that this is the evil Kali Age, in which not even the gods see Rāma, and even such a vision as he had seen makes one blessed among men.

The existence of the Rāmlīlā in the lifetime of Tulsīdās is of course not proved by this reference, since it is found only as a modern graft on a clearly late and derivative form of the legend. And the study of these three successive earlier forms of the tradition makes it quite clear that this tale was attached to the life of Tulsīdās for two centuries, without any reference to the problem of the origin of the Rāmlīlā, before we find it adapted to that purpose in our twentieth-century account of Meghā Bhagat. This part of Sarjū Dāsji's account, at least, is not authentic.

<sup>3</sup> Nābhādās, *Bhaktamāl Saṅkīrṇ* (Bombay, Śrīveṅkaṭeśvar Steam Press, saṃvat 1988 [A.D. 1931], p. 265; cf. Frederick Salmon Growse, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsī Dās*, pp. vi–ix. On Priyā Dās' date see Rāmchandra Śukla, *Hindī-sāhitya kā Itihās* (Banāras, Kāśī-Nāgarī-pracārīṇī Sabhā, saṃvat 2005), p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> William Price, *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections* (2nd ed. Calcutta, Asiatic Lithographing Co., 1830), pp. 92 f.

<sup>5</sup> George A. Grierson, 'Notes on Tulsī Dās', *Indian Antiquary*, 22 (Oct. 1893), 269 f.



Having discovered a fiction in the story of Sarjū Dās, shall we brush aside the whole of it? If a writer trained in a strong historical tradition had spun out his materials in this way, we could justly declare his entire work untrustworthy; but in circles where history-making and legend-making are not sharply distinguished, we dare not assume that a writer tells no history because he tells fictions. The assertions regarding the period, the place, and the person of the Rāmlīlā's initiation need to be examined without prejudice. The time indicated—the early seventeenth century—is not entirely out of line with Prinsep's general remark pointing toward the latter part of the same century. If the Rāmlīlā's method of handling the Rāmāyaṇa was in use before Tulsī's Rāmāyaṇa became popular (and we shall soon prove that it was), then almost inevitably some seventeenth-century person applied the old technique to the presentation of the new literary work. No place is a more likely setting for this transition than Banāras, Tulsī's own residence. Of the name Meghā Bhagat, we can only say that it is accompanied by a few biographical fragments which have a reassuring ring. The story of his death during the emotional climax of the performances makes medical sense and is not a stock hagiographic device for bringing the lives of saints to a close. If we may omit the myth of the divine theophany and the miraculous command to perform the dramas, there is no reason why we may not think it likely that the *Rāmcaritmānas* was first used on the stage in Banāras about A.D. 1625.

The history of this festival, using some other form of the Rāmāyaṇa, can be traced back about another hundred years. The first proof that the Rāmlīlā in its essential characteristics was known before Tulsī wrote is found in the Uttarakāṇḍ of the *Rāmcaritmānas* itself. There, Kāka Bhuśundi uses the following words in narrating his childhood activities in a previous birth :

At last I obtained the body of a twice-born person (*dvij*),  
which Veda and Purāṇa declare difficult to attain.  
Meeting and playing with the children then,  
I used to perform all the līlās of the Hero of the Raghus.<sup>6</sup>

The Hindī words translated 'playing' and 'perform' have the same ambiguity that troubles the interpretation of the English words and do not prove conclusively that actual dramas are being referred to here. But the reference to playing *all* the līlās suggests a systematic inclusiveness which is not characteristic of children engaged in mere frolic. Also, being born a *dvij* (which in the *Rāmcaritmānas* means a brahman) is evidently regarded as a preparation for 'playing' these līlās. We remember that in the Rāmlīlā the impersonators

<sup>6</sup> Tulsīdās, *Rāmcaritmānas*, ed. Hanumānprasād Poddār, p. 944 :

caram deh dvij kai main pāi,  
sur durlabh purān śruti gāi.  
khelauñ tahūñ bālkanh milā,  
karauñ sakal raghunāyak līlā.



of the central deities must be children, and brahman by caste. All in all, we conclude that Tulsī, probably in his own childhood, had known a festival in which high-caste children acted the Rāmāyaṇa serially, in a manner akin to that of the present Rāmlīlā.

Popular Vaishṇava Rāmāyaṇa plays were in existence also at the great Vaishṇava center at Purī in Orissa in the days before Tulsīdās. There is reference to it, first, in the aforementioned commentary of Priyā Dās, written in A.D. 1712. It relates in its extremely terse style:

In the holy place at Nīlācal [near Purī] representational līlā was going on. Someone assumed the role of Nriṣiṅha and, before the multitude, he slew [the player of Hiraṇyakaśipu]. Some said he had done it out of hostility, some said, because he was possessed. 'Give him [the role of] Daśaratha', one suggested. It was done. He carried out the sentiment to the full.<sup>7</sup>

The subcommentators, Rājā Pratāp Siṅh and Sītārām Śaraṇ Bhagavān Prasād, help us understand this famous case of homicide. An emotional devotee was given the role of the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu who slew with his claws Hiraṇyakaśipu, persecutor of Prahlād. Beside himself with feeling, this devotee on the stage ripped the opposing actor's stomach open, not merely in appearance, but actually. There was controversy over his responsibility for the act, and perplexity regarding what should be done with him. Some charged him with having done it out of enmity toward the other actor. It was decided to test the sincerity of his emotion by placing him in a situation where it would not be harmless to himself. He was asked to take the role of Daśaratha in a līlā at some subsequent time (Priyā Dās does not call it the Rāmlīlā, though his subcommentators do). In this līlā, just as the Rāmāyaṇa story suggests, the sorrow of Rāma's exile caused the Daśaratha of the play to die of grief.

We know this Rāmāyaṇa enactment at Purī to have been an old and stable institution. We find a reference to it in a document, a century older than Priyā Dās, that refers in turn to events which happened before A.D. 1533. The work is the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, which was surely completed by A.D. 1615.<sup>8</sup> Kṛṣṇadāsa describes in detail the festivals in which Caitanya participated while living in Purī at the same Nīlācal mentioned by Priyā Dās. In his *Madhyalīlā* XV, we read in the translation of Sanjib Kumar Chaudhuri:

And now the day of Vijaya-Dashami came. And it was the anniversary of the Lord Rama's victory at Lanka. And on this day the Lord and his followers took the guise of monkey-soldiers.

<sup>7</sup> Nābhādās, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, ed. and commentator Sītārām Śaraṇ Bhagavān Prasād, (Banāras, Baldev Nārāyaṇ Siṅh, 1903-09), pp. 576 f. Additional commentary in Rājā Pratāp Siṅh, *Bhakta Kalpadruma* (Lucknow, Naval Kiśor Press, 1870), pp. 470 f.; and Raghurājsiṅhji Dev, *Mahārājā of Rīvā, Śrī Bhaktamālā arthāt Rāmrāsikāvalī* (Bombay, Śrīveṅkaṭeśvar Press, 1888), p. 853.

<sup>8</sup> Sushil Kumar De, 'A Note on Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta*', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 9 (1933), pp. 98 f.

And the Lord himself was inspired with the spirit of the devoted Hanumana. And so he took branches and felt as if he was on the wall of Lanka and was about to break it down.

For he cried out in rage, 'Where art thou, O Ravana? Thou hast stolen the Mother of the World, so I shall kill thee with all thy kinsmen.'

And as the Lord thus cried out in ecstasy, all the people there saw it. And they wondered as they saw. And they all cried out, 'Glory, yea, all glory unto the Lord Chaitanya.'<sup>9</sup>

Although Purī is outside North India geographically, it is a national Vaishṇava pilgrimage place with which the North Indian Vaishṇavas of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were in living touch (see above, pp. 57, 64). These Nīlācal dramas, taken together, have many features in common with the Rāmlīlā. The enactment of the epic story is open to amateurs: It is quite natural for Caitanya and his disciples, who are certainly not professional actors, to take part in it. The acting is serial in nature, involving many days of acting prior to the celebration of Rāma's victory over Rāvaṇa. It follows the Rāmlīlā's calendar in arranging the climactic event, the storming of Laṅkā, on the vijayādaśamī day. It, too, is intensely emotional. It is a popular drama, played before the multitudes, not before a courtly few. We cannot reasonably think it to be a radically separate dramatic institution.

Placing this information on the Rāmāyaṇa dramas of Purī alongside Tulsīdās' reference to such plays in the Ganges Valley, we reach a high degree of certainty that there did exist in North India in the sixteenth century an amateur dramatic handling of the Rāmāyaṇa which was a direct antecedent of the Rāmlīlā of today. The dramatization of the *Rāmcaritmānas* which is attributed to Meghā Bhagat was not a new creation, but a new development in a tradition of acting which was going on early in the sixteenth century. Some time in the seventeenth century this type of play began to employ the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās as its text. The combination of this effective dramatic technique with this forceful literary creation gave to the Rāmlīlā the prominence which it has enjoyed in subsequent times.

A search for traces of this Rāmlīlā in times before A.D. 1500 has uncovered nothing. The Sanskrit dramaturgists are silent about any such type of play. General Indian literature describes no ancient festivity in which the peculiar features of the Rāmlīlā appear. Literature is of course silent about a great many aspects of the life of the common people, and many folk institutions may well have been current for generations without being mentioned. But the cumulative silence of century upon century amounts eventually to a decisive 'No'. The Rāmlīlā could not have been ancient and is not likely to have originated very much before the sixteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Kṛishṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Sri Sri Chaitanya-Charitamrita: Madhyalīlā*, trans. Sanjib Kumar Chaudhuri (Faridabad, Dacca, Nagendra Kumar Roy, Chaitanya-Charitamrita Karyalaya, 1940), p. 340; cf. J. N. Sarkar, *Chaitanya's Pilgrimages and Teachings* (London, 1913), p. 169.

If we insist on pressing the question of origin further, the question that we must ask is therefore 'From what parent form did the Rāmlīlā develop?'

Of course the Sanskrit *nāṭaka* had been prevalent in all parts of India for many centuries before the sixteenth, and it often dealt with Rāmāyaṇa themes.<sup>10</sup> But the *nāṭaka* is set apart from the Rāmlīlā by an all-round contrast of form and an even deeper difference in function. Its primary aim is not, as in the case of the Rāmlīlā, to make a sacred writing understood and appreciated. Even in those *nāṭakas* that deal with stories from the epic, the revered text itself has been broken up and recast into dialogue in which its identity as scripture is lost. The classical *nāṭaka* does not possess enough of the Rāmlīlā's characteristics to have been its progenitor. No other type of classical drama recognized in the standard manuals seems even as likely as the *nāṭaka* to be related historically. The forerunner of the Rāmlīlā, if it can be recovered at all, must be found outside the well-known Sanskrit categories.

In this connection we call attention to a form of Rāmāyaṇa drama which is first referred to in the *Harivaṃśa*. Let us study its essential characteristics, deferring all discussion of the possibility of its being related to the Rāmlīlā. There is a passage in the second book of the *Harivaṃśa* which has long interested students of the origin of the Sanskrit drama. It has been discussed by Keith, Lévi, Weber, and others.<sup>11</sup> The story goes that Pradyumna, prince of Dvārakā, desired admission into the city of Vajrapura in order to slay Vajranābha, king of the *asuras*. To effect his purpose, he impersonated a famous actor named Bhadra, and disguised his male companions and certain Yādava women as members of Bhadra's troupe. Vajranābha was induced to invite the performers to his capital. They were asked to perform first in a suburb named Svapura:

And then that sought-after actor (*naṭas*) danced (*nanṛite*) in that place  
The birth of the immeasurable Viṣṇu to slay the chief of the *rākshasas*,  
A dramatization illustrating the classical poem, the Rāmāyaṇa (*rāmāyaṇam*  
*mahākāvya muddeśayam nāṭakikṛitam*)

Affording supreme pleasure to the citizens of Svapura.  
Lomapāda-daśaratha caused Śāntā, accompanied by courtesans,  
To fetch Rishyaśṛṅga the great hermit, O faultless one.  
Rāma, Lakshmaṇa, Śatrughna and Bharata, O Son of Bhārata,  
And Rishyaśṛṅga and Śāntā were played by actors looking just like them.

—*Harivaṃśa*, II : 92.5–8, Calcutta edition 8671–74.

The demons were beside themselves with wonder and praise when they saw the troupe's costume and pantomime (*saṃskārābhinayau*, v. 10). The success

<sup>10</sup> Sylvain Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien*, pp. 267–95.

<sup>11</sup> *Harivaṃśa*, 2.91.58 to 2.92.32 (Bombay, Gopālnārāyaṇ, 1895); and *Harivaṃśa*, 8663–8699 (Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1839). French translation by Simon Alexandre Langlois, *Harivansa* (2 vols., London, Parbury, Allen & Co., 1834–35), 2, 120–24. Discussed by Arthu Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 48 f.; Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien*, pp. 326–29; Albrecht Weber, *Indische Studien*, 13, 494 f.; J. Grosset, *Contribution à l'étude de la musique hindoue* (Paris, E. Leroux, 1888), pp. 11–13.



of the performance brought an immediate invitation to play before the king in the inner city. In actors' guise they entered the theater prepared for them there and undertook the dancing (*nṛityārtham upacakramuḥ*, v. 21). The various instrumentalists joined in a prelude, and the women of the troupe sang a song entitled 'Descent of the Ganges' which affected the asuras deeply (vv. 21–24). The opening benediction was pronounced. Next Pradyumna uttered a *śloka* relating to the descent of the Ganges, *samyak svabhinayānviṭam*, 'accompanied by excellent pantomime at the same time', says the Calcutta edition, line 8693. Then they danced (*nanṛitur*) a drama dealing with Rambhā's difficulties with Rāvaṇa and her meeting with Nalakūbara (v. 28). One of the Yādava women named Manovatī impersonated Rambhā; Śura played Rāvaṇa; Pradyumna had the role of Nalakūbara; and Śāmba played the buffoon. Mount Kailāsa was shown magically on the stage; the villainous Rāvaṇa was put under a curse; and Rambhā was soothed by Nalakūbara. 'The heroic sons of Yadu danced (*nanṛitur*) that production, the glory of the omniscient great-souled sage Nārada' (*nāradasya muneḥ kīrtiṃ sarvajñasya mahātmanah*, v. 31). The asuras heaped praises and rewards upon the actors because of their brilliance in footwork, dance, and gesture (*pādoddhāreṇa nṛityena tathaiṣvābhinayena ca*, v. 32).

The author of the *Harivaṃśa* was intent on telling his tale, not on describing stage methods, and therefore we cannot claim to be able to visualize clearly the form of these productions. A careful analysis of the language used enables us to make two or three generalizations, however, with fair certitude. The first and surest is that the primary responsibility of the actors was pantomimic dance. We do not rest this statement on the fact that the term for actor is *naṭa*, a word which originally meant 'dancer' but which was of a less certain meaning in the vaguely known time of the *Harivaṃśa*. But we come to this conclusion because the action-verb *nṛit*, 'to dance', used four times over (vv. 5, 21, 28, 31), is the only verb employed to refer to the overall action of performing the plays. The technique of the *nṛitya* was not mere direct rhythmic imitation of ordinary motions as is the case in Occidental dance pantomime, but it involved *abhinaya* (v. 10, v. 32), the system of conventionalized motion-symbols which are the silent speech of the Indian dance. No mention is made of the use of any other speech than this in acting. The hero of the second drama is said to have sung a verse, but only as a part of the preliminaries and not in the drama itself. The only other reference to vocal work is the narration of how the Yādava women, in the preliminaries of the second drama, sang a sweet song about the descent of the Ganges. We are making an assumption, but not a strained one, when we suppose that this chorus was a continuing group which sang throughout the dramas. For these plays were not wordless musical scores. When we read in verse 6 that



the first play was a dramatization relating to the Rāmāyaṇa, we are not certain that a derivative literary text is referred to, but when we read in verse 31 that the second play was the glory of the Muni Nārada, we know that it was a secondary literary composition. It had a text, which somebody in the troupe had to recite. It is more likely that this was the primary responsibility of the female singers, whose vocal activities are mentioned, than of the actors who are mentioned only as renderers of abhinaya. In short, it is not reasonable to suppose that these spectacles were anything other than choral ballet, with backstage singers singing a hallowed text, and actors expressing themselves primarily, at least, in the very communicative gesture language of the Indian dance. And this dramatic technique is being applied to stories drawn from the Rāmāyaṇa cycle.

Could the Rāmlīlā have developed from this kind of presentation? The notion seems fantastic on two counts. The first difficulty is typological: The Rāmlīlā is by no means a dance drama. It is so unlike these Harivaṃśa plays that kinship seems improbable. The second consideration against it is chronological. No one dates the Harivaṃśa later than A.D. 400. At least a thousand years separate it from the first known appearance of the Rāmlīlā.

With regard to the time gap, it can be shown that the dance-drama technique just described was not only far-extended but also long-enduring in India. Its presence can be detected in several records of the medieval period. Such ballets were known in North India itself at least as late as the fourteenth century, and they survived there in debased form until the sixteenth. In numerous regions bordering on the North Indian plains, that style of acting is still in use.

Our evidence of such medieval handling of Rāma themes comes, first, from a commentary on the *Upadeśarasāyanarāsa*, a moralistic Jain poem. The *Upadeśarasāyanarāsa* itself is the work of Jinadattasūri, head of the Khartara Gaccha, who died in Ajmer in A.D. 1154.<sup>12</sup> The commentary was written in A.D. 1236–37 by Jinapāloṇpādhyāya, who must also have belonged to the Khartara sect, since he wrote a treatise on its line of spiritual preceptors, had one of these pontiffs as his own teacher, and had another as his literary patron.<sup>13</sup> We have no specific information on where Jinapāloṇpādhyāya lived, but available data on the distribution of the sect and on the scenes of the activities of

<sup>12</sup> Kailash Prasad Jain, *Jainism in Rajasthan* (Sholapur, Jain Samskr̥ti Samrakshaka Sangha, 1963), p. 19. The *Upadeśarasāyanarāsa* with the commentarial passage in question is found in Lalchandra Bhagawandas Gandhi, *Three Apabhraṃśa Works of Jinadattasūri with Commentaries*, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, XXXVII (Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1927), pp. 47f.

<sup>13</sup> Jain, p. 186, says Jinapāloṇpādhyāya wrote a *Kharataragacchagurvāvalī*. For other biographical information, see Hari Damodar Velankar, *Jinaratnakośa* (Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1944), under 'Carcari', 'Upadeśarasāyana', and 'Dharma-rasāyana'.

its leaders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries point to the country between Bengal and Gujarat, and particularly to Rajasthan.<sup>14</sup> Therefore Jinapālo-pādhyāya's testimony has relevance, from the point of view of geography, for the history of North Indian drama in general. Reading verses 36 and 37 of the *Upadeśarasāyanarāsa* with the commentary on them, we find a warning against various common festivities in which faithful Jains should not take part. They should not dance the *tālārāsaka* at night even by lamplight, lest they trample ants. They should not dance the sensual staff-dance (*laguḍarāsa*) even in the daytime (v. 36). They should dance only religious dramas about pious world-renouncing kings like Emperor Balarāja Daśarṇabhadra, which cause a longing for salvation to rise in the hearts of spectators and move them to become monks (v. 37). Jinapālo-pādhyāya's explanation of this verse runs thus, as transposed into Sanskrit by the editor : *dhārmikānyeva paraṃ nāṭakāni nṛityante, na tu rāma-rāvaṇādi-sambandhīni*, 'They dance religious dramas only, but not those connected with Rāma, Rāvaṇa, and so forth.' The reader is being admonished against certain well-known theatrical representations in which the bloody combats of the Yuddha-kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa were danced. We understand well why they are not recommended for the edification of pacifistic Jains. The point of interest for us is the demonstration that a number of Rāmāyaṇa dance dramas existed in the northern part of India in the thirteenth century and that they were common enough to be thought a moral menace to Jains.

Evidence of such dramas is found also in the opening verses of Madhusūdana's recension of the *Mahānāṭaka*. Manuscripts of this recension are particularly common in Bengal and Orissa, but at least one copy has been found in Gujarat.<sup>15</sup> Discussions of the period of the *Mahānāṭaka*'s formation point to a medieval rather than an ancient origin.<sup>16</sup> Esteller, who has made the most serious study of the manuscripts of this work, demonstrates that the recension of Dāmodara is the earlier and that Madhusūdana created his later version out of Dāmodara's text entirely by selecting, amplifying, and rearranging the material. Madhusūdana can be seen to have had two ends in mind: to harmonize the *Mahānāṭaka* entirely with the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki in content and sequence of events, and to 'dramatize' the material by linking

<sup>14</sup> Jain, pp. 28, 58; Shantaram Bhalchandra Deo, 'History of Jaina Monachism', *Deccan College Dissertation Series* (Poona, Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, 1956), p. 528; Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Der Jainismus* (Berlin, Alf Häger Verlag, 1925), p. 352.

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Lüders, *Philologica Indica* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1940), pp. 398 f., reprinted from his article 'Die Śaubbikas,' in *Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 33 (1916), 698-737.

<sup>16</sup> Sushil Kumar De, 'The Problem of the Mahānāṭaka,' *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 7 (1931), 542; Śivaprasad Bhattacharyya, 'The Mahānāṭaka Problem,' *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 10 (1934), 496.

up its disjointed story, pruning out absurd material, and striving toward conformity with the pattern of the classical *nāṭaka*.<sup>17</sup> There is nothing in the text of Dāmodara to indicate how he expected his text to be used, but in Madhusūdana's recension we find that, immediately after the *nāndī*, the *sūtradhāra* introduces the play to the audience in a verse which tells something of how it is to be acted.

The piece to be presented, says this master of ceremonies, was recited by Hanumān on instruction from Vālmiki. It is Rāma's deeds that are to be enacted, and 'we are the auspicious dancers', '*saumyā vyaṃ nartakāḥ*'. He wishes pleasure to the sedate assembly and says, 'Now I shall recite the Rāmāyaṇa', '*adhunā vaktāsmi Rāmāyaṇam*'.<sup>18</sup> 'The Rāmāyaṇa' in this case is evidently the Rāma story as given in the text of the *Mahānāṭaka* itself, for that is what follows.

In our conception of the presentation of this drama, what function shall we suppose to belong to the general body of the *nartakas* mentioned in these lines? We cannot believe that they spoke the lines of the text of the drama. The master of ceremonies says that *he* is going to do that. Furthermore, the text of the composition is such that actors uttering dialogue could not convey it to an audience. Much of the text is not dialogue but impersonal narrative verse. The *sūtradhāra* who recites 'the Rāmāyaṇa' must be the person who causes the story to be heard. The function which remains for the *nartakas*, then, is that of causing the deeds of Rāma to be *seen*. M. Winternitz remarks in his history of Indian literature, 'It seems that the poem was intended to be recited by one person, while at the same time mute actors represented the narrative action pantomimically.'<sup>19</sup> We shall probably be more precise if we understand *nartakāḥ* to mean not 'mute actors', but 'dancers'. Dance is the medium which the word *nartakāḥ* literally implies, and dance is the form of pantomime that is traditional on the Indian stage. We have here a further trace of medieval Rāmāite dance drama.

Professor Heinrich Lüders argues that the *saumyā* of our text is a scribal error for *saubhyā* and that *saubhyās* or *śaubhikās* were producers of shadow plays. We are more certain that during much of its history the *Mahānāṭaka* was read and studied as a closet drama.<sup>20</sup> But, even if Madhusūdana's recension was, from the first, nothing but the text of a shadow play or of a closet drama,

<sup>17</sup> Adolph Esteller, *Die älteste Rezension des 'Mahānāṭakam,'* Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes XXI, 7 (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1937), pp. 28, 154.

<sup>18</sup> Vālmīker upadeśataḥ svayam aho vaktā Hanūmān kapiḥ  
śrīrāmasya Raghūdvaḥasya caritam saumyā vyaṃ nartakāḥ;  
goṣṭhī tāvad iyaṃ samastasumanāḥsaṃghena saṃveshṭitā  
tad dhīrāḥ kuruta pramodam adhunā vaktāsmi Rāmāyaṇam.

—Jīvānanda's edition, in *De, Indian Historical Quarterly*, 7 (1931), 581.

<sup>19</sup> M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, 3 (1920), 243.

<sup>20</sup> Lüders, p. 401; Keith, p. 272.



it still proves the existence of the kind of drama in which we are interested. Madhusūdana would not have presented his composition in the outward form of a recitative dance drama if no such type of performance were known.

A passage from the *Granth Sāhab* of the Sikhs will conclude our series of direct testimonies regarding North Indian dance renderings of the Rāmāyaṇa in the days before Tulsidās. In the hymn *Āsā kī Vār*, Guru Nānak mentions certain popular performances. He had seen them, according to tradition, while on a visit to Vṛindāban. M. A. Macauliffe assumes the reliability of this tradition in his handling of the hymn in *The Sikh Religion*.<sup>21</sup> Even if we were to reject it, the only loss would be the specific localization of the acting in a particular North Indian town. That Nānak (A.D. 1469–1538) wrote the *Āsā kī Vār* has not been questioned, and the plays he mentions in it must necessarily have had their setting somewhere in the north. If there had been no such plays as the hymn describes in the general region referred to, he would hardly have written a hymn in a mixture of old Western Hindī and Panjābī urging his followers to avoid them.

In the fourth and fifth ślokas of the *Āsā kī Vār* the Guru protests the materialistic spirit of certain troupes of actors :

4. How many Kṛishṇa-plays there are, how many opinions on the Vedas !  
How many beggars dance and, twisting and falling, beat time with their hands !  
The mercenary fellows go into the market-place and draw out the market crowd.  
As kings and queens, they sing and utter fantastic stuff,  
Wearing rings and necklaces worth hundreds of thousands of rupees.  
The body on which they are worn will become ashes, O Nānak.
5. The disciples play instruments, the gurus dance,  
Shake their feet, roll their heads;  
The dust keeps flying and falls on their hair.  
People look on, laugh, and go home.  
It is for the sake of bread that they beat time and purposely fall on the ground,  
That the gopīs and the Kṛishṇas sing,  
That the Sītās and Royal Rāmas sing.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, I, 57.

<sup>22</sup> A devanāgarī text is found in Bhāi Sāhab Mahtāb Siṅh, *Śrī Āsā jī kī Vār Saṭika* (Ayodhyā, Śrī Guru Nānak Nivās, n.d.), pp. 27 f., 33 :

Nānak nirbhau niraṅkāru hori kete rām rakāl,  
ketiā kan kahāñiā kete bed bīcār.  
Kete nacahi maṅgate giṛi muṛi pūrahi tāl,  
bājāri bājār mahi āi karhahi bājār.  
Gāvahi rāje rāñiā bolahi āl patāl,  
lakh ṭakiā ke mundaṛe lakh ṭakiā ke hār.  
Jitu tani pāiāhi nānakā se tan hovahi chār . . .  
Vāini cele nacani gur, pair halāini pherani siri.  
uḍi uḍi rāvā jhāṭai pāi, vekhai loku hasai ghari jāi.  
Roṭiā kārāni pūrahi tāl, āpu pachārahi dharatī nāli,  
gāvani gopīā gāvani kār, gāvani sītā rāje rām.

A new English translation is offered only in order to utilize valuable insights in the Sikh commentary which accompanies the text. For other English renderings, see Macauliffe, pp. 223 f.; and Ernst Trumpp, *The Ādi Granth* (London, W. H. Allen, 1877), p. 638.



Here Nānak exposes the feigned religious ecstasies and other mercenary tricks of bands of actors who staged Rāmāyaṇa and other stories. They were organized as gurus and disciples and claimed respect as persons engaged in a religious enterprise, though they pandered to worldly people's taste for glitter and buffoonery.

With regard to the technique of these troupes, Nānak uses the verb *bolnā*, 'to speak', but only once and only in a general sense in a context that does not necessarily indicate the use of prose dialogue. The principal verb used to refer to utterance is *gānā*, 'to sing'. It appears three times, and each time, it is the costumed actors who are represented as singing, not a choragus. Evidently these actors, unlike those of the earlier performances we have studied, did not rely upon abhinaya for communication but resorted to full operatic recitation on the stage. Yet in a crude sense their plays were still dance dramas. On the physical movements of the actors we find only the verb *nacnā*, 'to dance', and action-words which describe motions that are a part of dancing. The references to contorting the body, to beating time with the hands, to shaking the feet and rolling the head, to extravagant emotion which disregards personal tidiness—none of these suggest a dance tradition of any great sophistication. If the choreography of these North Indian plays sprang historically from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, then the profession had fallen upon evil days. Its practitioners had been driven into the marketplaces. In some sense they were 'beggars'. They practised a free kind of dance, adapted to the training and tastes of ordinary townspeople and to the spirit of the ecstatic bhakti cult. If we may regard the art of the classical dance-manual as the central tradition of Indian dance, we must understand these sixteenth-century plays as a development in which communication has shifted its reliance from the ancient mudrās to the sung word and in which dance has retained a place for itself on the stage only by reducing itself to the humble function of reinforcing emotion. About the year A.D. 1500, then, theatrical dance was dimly remembered in North India, but all the sophistication of its technique had been abandoned because of a general ignorance of its intricate symbols.

Though the three passages which we have just cited prove the existence of epic plays in dance-drama style in Northern India in medieval times, one could deny any necessity of believing that they continued long enough or touched the life of the central Ganges valley intimately enough to form a continuity with the history of the Rāmlīlā. The ballet dramas to which the Jain materials and the *Mahānāṭaka* testify could very well have come to an absolute end, someone could say, two centuries before Tulsīdās was born. The plays referred to by Nānak might belong to a radically independent tradition. The place reference in all three passages could be said to be questionable or too indefinite. If a genetic relation between dance drama and Rāmlīlā is to be

accepted, we need clearer demonstrations that the dance drama survived long enough to be in contact with the Rāmlilā in the period and in the area of its rise.

We shall attempt to meet this demand by showing that the technique just described has been all-pervasive in India, that its tradition has continued unbroken in some areas even to the present day, and that even later than the time of Tulsidās and Meghā Bhagat it was very much alive in many border regions of North India.

A survey of dance techniques used in mystery plays all over India reveals that the general methods of the Harivaṃśa dramas are still very widely used. We shall now review the principal occurrences of this dance drama in order to clarify our conception of the type and to identify its essential techniques.

The first of these far-flung traditions on which we have adequate information is a Rāmāyaṇa mystery play of Kerala called the Rāmanāṭṭam. The conflicting surmises of various writers about the date of its origin show only that its beginnings are unknown. C. A. Menon says that the songs and ślokaś that make up the modern text are compositions of a certain prince of Kottārakkara in the late fifteenth century.<sup>23</sup> 'It describes the story of Śrī Rāma,' K. R. Pisharoti tells us, 'beginning with Daśaratha's *Putrakāmeṣṭi* sacrifice and ending with the siege of Lanka ... The whole play was divided into seven acts, to be staged in seven days.'<sup>24</sup> The technique of the Rāmanāṭṭam and related Kṛishṇanāṭṭam is described very clearly in an article by K. N. Sitaram:

There is no singing or speaking by the actors. The stories are taken from the Epics or Purāṇas, and are mostly written in the vernacular with a large admixture of Sanskrit, or in the maṇipravālaṃ style (one vernacular word to every Sanskrit word), and are set to music. The actors perform their parts by means of mudrās, gestures and poses only, without speaking, while special musicians sing the substance of what is being acted, or rather the players act to the music.<sup>25</sup>

Since much more time is required to dance a given portion of the text of the play than to sing it, the musicians elaborate or repeat their lines until the dancer has finished. There is a striking similarity between this technique and that suggested in the Harivaṃśa and the *Mahānāṭaka*.

Closely related to Rāmanāṭṭam is the kathakalī, also of Kerala. A good sketch of it has been written by Mr. Pisharoti, and a careful and detailed dissertation on the kathakalī was written by Emily Gilchrist Hatch.<sup>26</sup> In

<sup>23</sup> C. A. Menon, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 9 (1941), 122.

<sup>24</sup> K. R. Pisharoti, *Annammalai University Journal*, 1 (1932), 106.

<sup>25</sup> K. N. Sitaram, 'Dramatic Representations in South India,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1924), p. 233.

<sup>26</sup> Pisharoti, *Annammalai University Journal*, 1 (1932), pp. 105-12; Emily Gilchrist Hatch, 'The Kathakali, The Indigenous Drama of Malabar'; for additional titles, see p. 2, note 3.

the appendix of her work Mrs. Hatch lists the titles of some twenty kathakālī plays which are obviously based on the Rāmāyaṇa and gives synopses of six of them. Again, the age of the tradition is debated. The oldest extant kathakālī texts are eight serial Rāmāyaṇa plays by Kerala Varma Raja who is said by some to have lived as early as A.D. 1487 and by others as late as 1661.

The text of a kathakālī drama consists of three elements: *ślokas* (also called *pādas*), *daṇḍakas* and *padas*. The *ślokas* are in Sanskrit; the *daṇḍakas* are in mixed Sanskrit and Malayalam; and the *padas* are nowadays in Malayalam, although in former times they were often in Sanskrit or Maṇipravālam. The *ślokas* and *daṇḍakas* are sung by the chief singer to introduce the actors and to provide explanations and connectives which help the narrative along. The *padas*, in rhythmic and measured prose, are the greater part of the play and the medium of all its dialogue.

When the movement of the drama arrives at a given *pada*, it is sung first by the chief singer and then repeated by the second singer. Drummers then beat out the rhythm of the portion just sung. And from the start of the singing, the appropriate actor begins to act out the lines in a highly conventionalized sign language without uttering a word. In acting out his 'speeches', he uses natural pantomime to some extent and natural expressions indicating emotion; but he also spells out the sentences in gestural ideograms which he has learned during ten or twelve years of study. His gestures are not exactly synchronized with the words of the singers because his task is more time-consuming than theirs. Mrs. Hatch pictures the enacting of a hypothetical passage thus:

The singer may have a verse which says, 'I am filled with sadness at your life. You once had great riches, your life was a bed of roses. Now you have nothing.' It may take the actor fifteen minutes or more to show 'Your life was a bed of roses'. He might pantomime the bed, spread it with silken covers, plump up the pillows, pick flowers, scatter them over the bed, pick out a thorn, sprinkle the bed and pillows with rose water. Until the actor has finished pantomiming the 'bed of roses', naturally the singers cannot continue with the next verse of the song, which might be the reply from the other character, saying, 'Do not worry. Let us plan to kill this demon who has cursed us so.' Nor may the singer stand quietly without singing. So he repeats the verse as many times as he has to. Similarly, the actor cannot hurry through his pantomimic spelling-out without a minimum of gestures. If he does not feel like elaborating the verse he does not have to, but he must keep acting at least as long as it takes for the first singer to sing the verse and the second singer to repeat it, for this repetition of the verse is a traditional procedure always carefully adhered to.<sup>27</sup>

After completing the abhinaya of a verse of four to six lines, the dancer indicates the termination by doing a brief nonmimetic turn-around called a *kalāsa*. Then the process is repeated with the next *pada*.

Kathakālī dancers use 64 *mudrās*, 24 being single-hand symbols and 40 being combined ones. Each of these 64 can have a number of meanings

<sup>27</sup> Hatch, pp. 19 f.



according to the position of the hand or hands with reference to the body or according to the motion of limbs which accompanies it. In all there are 450 distinct meanings which the dancer can communicate by a distinguishable sign or gesture. Mrs. Hatch provides a complete list of these symbols.<sup>28</sup> She also includes a chart prepared by the Travancore Government's Department of Archaeology in which the 24 single mudrās of kathakalī are pictured and compared with those prescribed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Abhinayadarpaṇa*, the *Hastalakṣaṇapradīpikā* and the Tamil *Chilapatikaram*.<sup>29</sup> The kathakalī hand symbols have a substantial identity with those described in the ancient works. Minor difference in formation is usual; drastic variation is only occasional; and continuity of tradition is obvious. The stage technique of kathakalī is thereby revealed as ancient and more than local, despite the fact that the documentary history of this Malabar drama fades out when one goes back three or four hundred years. Again, the kathakalī style, so far as we can see, is in no way out of harmony with the type of production noticed in the *Harivaṃśa* and elsewhere.

Madras also has its survivals of a similar dance drama. We are told that brahman actors of Ūttukāḍu and Śūlamangalam in Tanjore District stage annually at the local temples during the spring festival eight plays called Bhāgavata Melā Nāṭaka. Professor V. Raghavan of the University of Madras, to whom we are indebted for our information, assures us that the complete gesture language of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* survives in these plays; a brahman of his acquaintance who performs in them is able to translate into mudrās any idea proposed to him.<sup>30</sup> Information on the themes of these dramas is incomplete, but the Vaishṇava myth of the man-lion incarnation, at least, is included. Two singers and a text-reader recite the script. Each character makes his entrance upon the stage, dancing to his own special introductory song. 'The whole action is in the form of songs,' says Raghavan, 'sung from behind and also by the character and rendered into abhinaya by the character. In between these songs, prose links are read out by the Grānthika.'<sup>31</sup> Although in these plays the dancer joins in the singing (something which kathakalī does not allow), the actor is still primarily a dancer rather than a singer, and the traditional gesture language is still his basic medium of expression.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 288-97.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> V. Raghavan 'Kathakali and Bharata Natya,' *Triveni*, 6 (July-Dec. 1933), 160. Raghavan identifies the style of these Bhāgavata Melā Nāṭakas with that of plays called Bāgavatamulu which have existed since at least A.D. 1502 in Kūcipūḍi village, Kistna District, Andhra. The Bāgavatamulu are described incompletely in P. Venkatachala Pathy, *Le Théâtre télougou contemporain*, pp. 47 ff.; and in P. T. Raju, *Telugu Literature* (Bombay, International Book House, 1944), pp. 70 f.

<sup>31</sup> Raghavan, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 5 (1937), 170.



In Mysore and the Kanarese-speaking districts of Bombay another dance drama usually called Yakshagānā survives.<sup>32</sup> Because the director and chief singer of the troupe of performers is called the Bhāgavata, the literature sometimes refers to Yakshagānās as 'Bhāgavata plays'. About fifteen professional troupes of Yakshagānā players still tour this area during the dry season of the year. The texts of their plays are written by simple village poets in modern Kanarese verse. Rāmāyaṇa plays are prominent in their repertoire, which also includes performances based on the Mahābhārata and the purāṇas. The songs of the chief singer bridge gaps in the narrative and introduce each new character as he enters the stage. With the better-staffed troupes at least, a backstage chorus then takes over and sings the ballads that convey the utterances and describe the actions of the character currently on the stage. While the ballad is being sung, the actor dances out the words of each verse using appropriate signs and gestures. It is said that a considerable knowledge of the classical abhinaya is demanded even of ordinary members of the cast and that the gestures used by the Yakshagānā players are closely akin to those of the kathakālī and hence to the ancient tradition. For the sake of particular emphasis, Yakshagānā dancers may join in the singing now and then if they wish. They differ from kathakālī actors also in the fact that they supplement their dance-interpretations with prose speech. Unable to assume that his modern audience has understood the dialogue that he has expressed in mute symbols, the Yakshagānā actor pauses at the finish of his rendering of a verse in dance, and adds a spoken paraphrase in ordinary idiomatic Kanarese.

The dramatic use of mudrās is included in the remnants of the classical dance in Bengal. We are assured of this by Manomohan Ghosh in the introduction to his translation of the *Abhinayadarpaṇam*: 'Depicting narratives by means of dance and abhinaya is still to be found in the Śaiva ritualistic dances of the Nilapūjā found all over Bengal.'<sup>33</sup> The extensive evidence of Vaishṇava dance-drama in Orissa, Bengal and Bihar is set forth at the conclusion of Chapter Nine and will not be repeated here.

We shall complete our geographical circuit with some especially full information on a dance-drama tradition that was thriving in Nepal at the alleged time of Meghā Bhagat and for at least a century thereafter. We call attention

<sup>32</sup> L. Narasimhachar, 'The Bhagavata Plays in Mysore,' *Proceedings and Transactions of the Eighth All-India Oriental Conference*, Mysore, Dec. 1935 (Bangalore, Government Press, 1937), pp. 698-708; K. P. Adiga, 'Yaksha-Gana Players of Kanara,' *Illustrated Weekly of India* (Dec. 7, 1941), p. 21; G. R. Pandeshwar, 'Yakshagana Nataka, or the Folk-song Plays of Rural Karnatak,' *Bharat Jyoti* (Aug. 14, 1949), p. 2; Raghavan, *Triveni*, 6 (July-Dec. 1933), 161 and note. In his publication of 1966, Balwant Gargi, op. cit., pp. 145-64, no longer confirms clearly the descriptive details stressed above.

<sup>33</sup> Manomohan Ghosh, ed. and trans., *Nandikeśvara's Abhinayadarpaṇam* (Calcutta, Calcutta Sanskrit Series, 5, 1934), p. xxiv.

to three manuscript plays held in the library of the German Oriental Society and described in its catalogue.<sup>34</sup> The plays differ from all known types of classical dialogue drama and show internally that they were written for enactment in dance. The *Muditakuvalayāśvanāṭakam*, No. 6, was written in A.D. 1628 by a court brahman named Vaṃśamaṇi, son of Rāmacandraśarman. The stage directions indicate that as the play begins the sūtradhāra recites the *nāndīśloka*, tenders a garland as an offering, and then dances (*nṛityati*).<sup>35</sup> He gives orders to his actors that they shall dance the play (*nāṭaka se nācaha*).<sup>36</sup> The *Lalitakuvalayāśvamadālasānāṭakam*, No. 5, was written by Rāmabhadra son of Śaṅkara in A.D. 1665 for presentation before King Nivāsamalla at the celebration of the opening of a new canal. It bears the label of the dance upon it in its alternative subtitles, *Śivamahimānṛitya* and *Madālasānṛitya*. By its very title No. 4 is also a dance: It has been published by August Conrady as *Das Hariścandraṇṛityam, Ein altnepalesisches Tanzspiel*.<sup>37</sup> The *Hariścandraṇṛityam* was written by Rāmabhadraśarman in A.D. 1651 for performance at the Indrayātrā, a Hindu festival which until the end of the Malla Dynasty, about 1770, was celebrated with lavish spectacle.

Johannes Klatt examined these plays and concluded that since the text is made up of songs and dances, they are what we would call ballets. A. Müller denies this, calling them 'a kind of opera'. Sylvain Lévi considers No. 6 'a sort of opera in which only the verses are fixed; the prose parts are left to the improvisation of the actors'.<sup>38</sup> Müller, too, assumes that the actors must have spoken prose speeches that were not recorded. 'The manuscript is very faulty and obviously not complete,' he says, 'since the speech of individual persons like Viśvāmitra is often found to be merely indicated, not worked out.'<sup>39</sup> Thus all who have studied these dramas have noted the lack of prose dialogue in them, and most have assumed that the playwrights looked on dialogue so casually that they did not trouble to formulate and record it. The scholars have not taken seriously enough the fact that these plays are plainly called dances. A European writer who is not fully aware of the expressive powers of the Indian dance may feel the necessity of prose dialogue more insistently than a Nepalese audience. The notion that the court playwright and the royal actors on solemn state occasions left a large part of

<sup>34</sup> A. Müller, *Katalog der Bibliothek der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 2, Handschriften... (Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1881), 6–10. Described also in Johanne, Klatt, ed., *De Trecentis Cāṇakya Poetae Indici Sententiis* (Halle, inaugural dissertations 1872), pp. 1 f. For historical background, see Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal*, 2, 241.

<sup>35</sup> Klatt, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Pischel in *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (1891), 1, 358.

<sup>37</sup> August Conrady, *Das Hariścandraṇṛityam. Ein altnepalesisches Tanzspiel* (Leipzig, K. F. Koehlers Antiquarium, 1891).

<sup>38</sup> Lévi, *Le Népal*, 2, 242.

<sup>39</sup> Müller, p. 5.

their utterance to improvisation does not seem as likely as the supposition that the texts lack prose dialogue because the performances did not need and did not contain prose dialogue. Without denying that prose speeches may have been inserted into the plays to some extent, it can be proved that speech was not the actors' principal means of expression on the stage.

The evidence is the testimony of an eyewitness. Sometime during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, while Malla kings still reigned and patronized the Indrayātrā festivities in Nepal, Father Cassiano Beligatti, a Capuchin, passed through Katmandu on his way to Tibet and wrote in his diary a detailed account of the dramatic and other celebrations which occurred in connection with the Indrayātrā there. Although the *Hariścandranṛityam* was written especially for the Indrayātrā, we cannot of course be sure that this play was among those which he saw on the stage. But it is clear enough in his description that he attended plays of the type represented in the manuscripts which we have just discussed.

The Indrayātrā dramas, says the visiting padre, were enacted on rectangular platforms about twenty feet on a side, erected in the streets and squares. Stage settings were elementary. The orchestra had the drum as its leading instrument and included at least eight players of small metal cymbals of different tones. The vocal part of the play was primarily the assignment of a complex chorus, and the stage performers were indeed dancers :

The actors of these comedies have very little recitativo and much action, so that the principal actor does not recite eight or ten phrases in the different scenes in a comedy lasting two or three hours ; but it is the choruses which sing the whole, as in the Greek comedies. In each comedy the Nepalese have at least two choruses, and the third is formed by the full chorus—that is, by the two choruses together. The actor expresses for example the extreme sadness of his situation, in two or three verses which he recites. The choruses in alternation sing mournfully the bitterness of his sorrow, the diverse passions brought about in the person's heart by that sorrow, such as hope, surrender, fear, daring, etc.—and thus of all the other passions. And while the chorus is singing, the actor at the same time, dancing constantly, accords the movements of his face, his feet, and his hands with the sense of the words which they sing.<sup>40</sup>

That Nepalese court plays were sometimes dance-dramas need not be argued further. It is clear also that in the essentials of their technique they were a part of an old and pervasive type which was to be found from Katmandu to Cape Comorin. Even after four hundred years of Muslim rule the type was still cultivated on all sides of the northern region of heavy Muslim penetration.

<sup>40</sup> Alberto Magnaghi, 'Relazione Inedita di un Viaggio al Tibet del Padre Cassiano Beligatti da Macerata (Prima metà del Secolo XVIII),' *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, 8 (Dec. 1901), 621 f. Partial French translation in Lévi, *Le Népal*, 2, 42 f. The distribution of duties in these Nepalese performances seems to be approximated in the ballad-like *khyāls* of Rajasthan referred to by John Robson in *A Selection of Khyāls or Mār-wāri Plays* (Beawar, Beawar Mission Press, 1866), pp. vi f. Robson says, 'And sometimes only one actor sings through several scenes, while numbers of others may be carrying on the action of the piece.' Unfortunately, his description of the manner of acting is fragmentary.



As we have seen, remnants of this theatrical tradition were probably surviving in the Ganges Valley itself in the sixteenth century. The Rāmlīlā arose in living contact with this dance-drama, and there is no chronological or geographical difficulty in supposing a genetic relationship between them.

The typological difficulty remains. Few productions on the Indian stage look less like the ancient dance than the Rāmlīlā. Dance has no integral place in it. Its monologues and dialogues are in everyday prose speech, not in the sign language of the *mudrās*. Movement on the stage is not emphasized, and it consists of direct imitation of normal bodily acts. Superficially, the Rāmlīlā seems most unlikely to be the unrecognized child of the dance-drama.

But, underneath the surface, there is a substantial similarity between these two forms. In all the incidences of dance-drama which we have studied, the central concern is the musical recitation of texts based on or drawn from the Rāmāyaṇa or similar sacred writings. The Rāmlīlā shares with the dance-dramas their fundamental purpose: to communicate and illuminate an epic text—in this case, Tulsīdās' recast of the entire Rāmāyaṇa legend. Both conceive the stage as a place where entire documents of narrative religious literature shall be recited. Both give the entire responsibility for recitation of the text to a chorus. In the case of the Rāmlīlā this chorus consists of the *paṇḍit* and his occasional assistants. The actors of the Rāmlīlā do not recite the literary text of the drama; their special responsibility is to do just what the dancers in the old dance-drama did: to bring to life and to interpret the words of the recitation. The one great difference is that the performers on the Rāmlīlā stage do not use the complicated symbols of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* but homely actions and simple speech. The two styles of drama show great similarity in structure, and where their techniques differ utterly in outward form, they remain analogous in function. A historical continuity between the two is possible.

The three centuries of severe Muslim rule between A.D. 1200 and 1500 were a time when there were strong pressures to compel the abandonment of the dance-drama's method for that of the Rāmlīlā. It was a period of hardship and change for all sophisticated Hindu arts in North India. The Hindu upper classes who had patronized them were generally destroyed or impoverished or drawn into the study of Muslim arts and literatures. The Muslim rulers who sometimes took up the maintenance of Hindu dancers were in no position to appreciate and demand the full art of the ancient dance-manuals. The classical Hindu dance was expensive: It required long and costly training of its performers and therefore had to find munificent patrons. It could be an effective means of communication only in the presence of audiences educated in its symbols. Muslim rule brought the decay of both the financial and the intellectual support of the performers of the Rāmāyaṇa ballets. As the



training of dancers degenerated and the incomprehension of Hindu spectators spread, the old technique must have faltered until it no longer communicated the epic effectively.

Those interested in dramatization of the Rāmāyaṇa must have resorted to various expedients to supplement or replace the *mudrās* with kinds of communication that are easier to employ and easier to understand. The technique of the modern Yakshagāṇā players of Kannara is such an effort to adapt to the modern viewer of the dance. Too far south to have suffered serious difficulty through the Islamicization of popular culture, the Yakshagāṇā is only now being subjected to pressure like that which existed in North India centuries ago. A later and more penetrating wave of foreign influence has altered the education of its audiences so that they have increasing difficulty in understanding the actors' translation of the verses of the play into the postures of the dance. So the modern Yakshagāṇā players, after doing the *abhinaya* of their lines in the traditional way, repeat their commentary in ordinary prose speech! The device is essentially a transitional one. Either the Yakshagāṇā audiences must re-master the ancient code, or in time the players must give it up. If the time should come when the esoteric gesturings of the actors mean nothing whatever to the onlookers, the performers will have reason to drop the ancient hand symbols completely. The choral recitation will continue, and the onetime dancers will be left with a bit of simple acting to do and with a major responsibility for spoken dialogue. They will become practitioners of the art of the Rāmlīlā—an art so simple that it can pass without difficulty into the hands of amateurs.

We believe that the Rāmlīlā was born of the ancient dance drama under the influence of forces like those which are altering the technique of the Yakshagāṇā. We suppose that it took shape in North India between A.D. 1200 and 1500. It was one of the readjustments toward simpler art forms made necessary by the intrusion into Hindustan of an overwhelming Muslim culture. By making a successful readjustment in the prevailing method of dramatizing the Rāmāyaṇa, the creators of the Rāmlīlā did much to preserve the epic's vital influence on North Indian life. The simplified stage technique which they developed was soon applied to a new vernacular Rāmāyaṇa of remarkable power and charm. The Rāmlīlā's style of acting and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, together, have carried traditional Hindu ideals even to the children and the illiterate of many generations and have contributed much to the continuity of Hindu culture in the North.



Part II

MATHURĀ'S OWN RĀSLĪLĀ







## THE TROUPES OF BRAJ AND THEIR ART

Most of the residents of Mathurā District who are professional actors are members of *rāsmaṇḍalīs*, or troupes for the performance of the *rāslīlā*.

We have seen that all the deeds of Viṣṇu are *līlās*, 'sports'. *Rās* is the name of a particular one of these deeds, which was done by Viṣṇu in his Kṛishṇa incarnation. On a certain autumn night when the moon was full, Kṛishṇa favored the gopīs by dancing with them a circular dance, which the Viṣṇu Purāṇa calls the *rāsa*.<sup>1</sup> The Bhāgavata Purāṇa brings the two terms together, calling this original romantic event the *rāsalīlā*.<sup>2</sup>

This *rās* dance, which Kṛishṇa performed with the gopīs, is celebrated in Vaishṇava song and story. The theologians of the Kṛishṇa cult, by symbolic interpretation, make it the prime revelation of a truth that is of central importance in the religious life of all devotees. The dance is re-enacted continually in the most-loved form of sectarian drama. The plays in which the re-enactment is an essential feature are called, in full, *rāslīlānukaraṇ*, 'the imitation of the *rās* sport'; but for convenience the compound is shortened, and the dramas are called *rāslīlās*.

A *rāslīlā* is not a re-enactment of the *rās* alone. The performance of this dance is always its first element, of central importance because it is a ritual celebration of Kṛishṇa's most gracious deed, meaningful to devotees however often it may be seen; but the presentation continues, dramatizing an important supplementary tale as well. Thus, every *rāslīlā* consists of an initial dance followed by a one-act play based on any one of the multitude of Kṛishṇa's *līlās*. The entire performance receives its name from its prior element, the *rās*, its most sacred component and its recurrent feature.

<sup>1</sup> Jīvānanda Vidyāsāgara, ed., *Viṣṇupurāṇam*, V.13.47-55, p. 532.

<sup>2</sup> Bhāgavata Purāṇa, III.2.14.

Today's actors find the origin of the rāslīlā in the example of the gopīs themselves. Kṛishṇa on that ancient night of the rās, they say, vanished suddenly from the circle of the gopīs and disappeared in the forest. His forlorn and despairing sweethearts wandered long among the trees in fruitless search for him. At last, to cheer themselves with memories of Kṛishṇa, they began to mimic his actions before one another. Various gopīs assumed the roles of Kṛishṇa, Balarāma, and the demons, the Vaishṇava purāṇas say; and they imitated Kṛishṇa's gait, his song, his lifting of Mount Govardhana, and his suppression of the serpent Kāliya and other monsters. Seeing the intentness of their devotion, Kṛishṇa soon returned to them in person.<sup>3</sup>

Modern people may enact Kṛishṇa's deeds or see them enacted in hope of similar gain. As Kishan Lāl Rāsdhārī of Vṛindāban explained the matter to the author, all who have love for Kṛishṇa in their hearts are gopīs, regardless of their sex. Kṛishṇa is the true object of their love, their real 'husband'. The most urgent business of their lives is to search for the Lord through the jungle of this world until they find him. Like the gopīs of old, we should express our affection and longing for Kṛishṇa by performing and seeing the imitation of his līlās. And as Kṛishṇa himself soon appeared before those cowherd girls who rehearsed dramatically his greatness and charm, we too, through hearing and seeing his līlās, will sooner be blessed by the beatific vision (darśan) of Kṛishṇa himself.

The rāslīlā is a drama of which Braj claims the sole guardianship; it is the monopoly of Braj residents because it is the enactment of those līlās of Kṛishṇa which he performed in Braj. Kṛishṇa is acknowledged to have done an infinite number of sportive acts in other regions as well. In heavenly realms he carries on his unmanifest sports (*aprakṛt līlās*) eternally in his transcendent form and therefore in a manner beyond human perception and beyond the reach of drama. When by his grace he descended to this world and performed manifest sports (*prakṛt līlās*), which are open to human knowledge, he did many of his deeds in Kurukshetra, Dvārakā, and other places far from Braj. These deeds are not enacted in the rāslīlā.<sup>4</sup> The actors of Braj do not claim them as their special possession: Their responsibility is Kṛishṇa's *bāl līlās*, the sports which he did as a child in his own boyhood home. The repertoire of the rāslīlā begins with the celebration of Kṛishṇa's birth (the *Janma Līlā*) and tells his life story as far as his triumph over Kaṇṣ in Mathurā (the *Kaṇṣbadh Līlā*) and his sending back a messenger to console his childhood friends

<sup>3</sup> Viṣṇu Purāṇa V.13.24-29; Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.30.13-23; Harivaṃśa 4088-91 (Calcutta ed.); Harivaṃśa II.21.25-28 (Bombay ed.). For quotations and discussion, see Chap. 9.

<sup>4</sup> The one exception is the *Sudāmā Līlā* (pp. 177-78 below, No. 98), which is set in Dvārakā; but it is the story of Kṛishṇa's relation with a childhood friend.

(the *Uddhav Līlā*). And who are more qualified than the actors of the Braj country, Kṛishṇa's fellow countrymen and neighbours, to present these scenes authentically?

Braj's claim to the *rāslīlā* seems to be generally accepted. Although plays on Kṛishṇa themes are acted in many fashions in many parts of India, the *rāslīlā*'s special structure and style have not been seen anywhere else by Braj actors who have traveled throughout the country; nor has the author seen anything on the living stage or in print to indicate that the *rāslīlā* has any other home.<sup>5</sup> It is recognized as the property of Braj.

Descriptive writing on the *rāslīlā* in Western languages—or in any language—is very scarce indeed.<sup>6</sup> One cause is the stubborn unintelligibility of the dramas, even when seen, to one who has not been introduced to the *rāslīlā*'s intricate world of special theological concepts and religious symbols. One of the few nineteenth-century notices of the *rāslīlā* is a report in the *London Times*, March 24, 1859, describing an evening's entertainment provided by a *rājā* for the European officials of Lucknow. The correspondent's one-sentence report betrays the boggling of the Western understanding in the face of the exotic:

There was one other interlude in the nautch, when there appeared six or eight boys dressed as girls, their faces covered with gold-leaf, who performed an abstruse comedy or mystery, and sang a chorus of an incomprehensible character, from which the company were diverted very pleasantly by an invitation to witness the fireworks from the balconies, verandahs, and flat roof of the palace.

This is a classic admission of incomprehension: The *rāslīlā* is by no means as readily understood as fireworks! Many others may have seen the *rāslīlā* but failed to write about it because they could not.

The major reason for the scarcity of eyewitness accounts, however, is the protective attitude of its patrons and producers, who are uneasy about how outsiders may interpret the amorous aspects of the legends which the *rāslīlā*

<sup>5</sup> The Bengal *yātrā* as seen among the Bengalis of Vṛindāban showed a very different organization, costuming, and set of dances. A historical relation is possible, but the two traditions are not closely akin. The *rāslīlā* of a Manipur troupe, seen in Vṛindāban in 1949, was even more radically dissimilar. Svāmī Muralīdhar Bohre reports that Bihar has a Kṛishṇa drama of its own which is unlike the Braj tradition. Though it focuses on a different cycle of Krishna myths, this stage tradition shares with the *rāslīlā* the unusual division into *rās* and *līlā* that will be described later in this chapter. See J. C. Mathur, *Drama in Rural India* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1964), p. 110. Apparently a fragment of this Maithilī drama has been preserved by Sir George A. Grierson in 'Twenty-one Vaishnava Hymns', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 53, Pt. I (1884), 87 f., No. 15. Only a drama seen by Sylvain Lévi at the turn of the century in Nepal seems likely to be closely related to the *rāslīlā*. See *Le Népal*, 2, 405–07, and his preface to Gaston Courtillier's translation, *Le Gita-govinda, pastorale de Jayadeva* (Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1904), pp. vi f.

<sup>6</sup> The most extensive description is found in Daśarath Ojhā, *Hindī Nāṭak, Udbhav aur Vikās*, pp. 93–99. As we shall see, the literary scholars of Braj have written much on the origin of the *rāslīlā*, but they assume familiarity with the dramas themselves.



dramatizes.<sup>7</sup> Even at the time of the writing of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa there were non-Vaiṣṇavas who criticized the morality of Kṛishṇa's relations with the gopīs, and the adherents of the Kṛishṇaite sects smart under censure to the present day.<sup>8</sup> They do not wish to give passing strangers any opportunity to sensationalize on the surface meaning of their myths if they lack the time and inclination to seek an understanding of the theological interpretation of those tales. Chapter seven contains the condensed plots of over a hundred of these dramas. No Western censor would lift an eyebrow at any of these plays. Detailed comment on the sexual symbolism of the Kṛishṇa cult is beyond the scope of this book.<sup>9</sup> The important point is that frequent derogatory remarks on the erotic aspects of the rāslīlā have made its sponsors apprehensive and seclusive. They do not encourage the attention of the merely curious, nor do they casually invite outsiders to their sessions. They discourage the photographing of performances lest pictures of their deity get into the hands of indifferent or hostile persons and suffer neglect or indignity. Performances are not held in market-places or public streets where any stranger may stop and stare. Their normal setting is the precinct of a temple or the privacy of a devotee's home. For these reasons published accounts of the rāslīlā are few, and many writers on the Indian stage have been unaware of its existence.

Three foreign observers in all have left serious first-hand reports on performances of this drama. The first may have been James Tod, who was in Rajasthan on diplomatic service from 1805 to 1822 and spent ten years of this time at the court of Daulat Rao Sindhia at Indore. On the Janmāshṭamī Day, he says, actors used to come to Indore from Mathurā and enact there 'a scenic representation of Kanhaiya and the Gopīs'. The performance included the rāsmaṇḍal dance; the vocal part of the drama was in mellifluous Braj dialect. Tod sums up his impressions of the festival plays of many seasons thus :

<sup>7</sup> Distant Manipur's rāslīlā performers maintain the same secrecy with regard to Muslims, occidentals and non-Vaiṣṇava Hindus. See Faubion Bowers, 'Dance and Drama in Manipur,' *The Atlantic* (October 1953), p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.33.25–28. Modern critics include Swami Dayananda, *The Light of Truth*, trans. Gangā Prasād Upādhyaya (Allahabad, Kālā Press, n.d.), pp. 530–40; Anon., *History of the Sect of Maharajas or Vallabhacharyas in Western India*, pp. 125 ff.; Kumārī Devī, *Pilgrim's India* (Calcutta, Vijaya Krishna & Brothers, 1930), pp. 126 f.; Bholanath Chunder, *The Travels of a Hindu*, 2 (London, Trübner & Co., 1896), 71. In a svāṅg of the Panjab the ascetic Machandar Nāth disgraces himself by attending a rāsdhārī's performance (see Sir Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Panjāb*, 2, 21, line 206).

<sup>9</sup> See Hanumānprasād Poddār, *Gopis' Love for Sri Krishna* (Gorakhpur, Gita Press, 1941); Niśi-Kānta Sānyāl, *The Erotic Principle and Unalloyed Devotion*; Hariharānanda Sarasvatī, 'Stolen Clothes,' *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 10 (1942), 103–39. Moderate comment from outside the cult may be seen in Manindra Mohan Bose, *The Post-Caitanya Sahajīya Cult in Bengal* (University of Calcutta, 1930), pp. 21–29; Lālā Sitā Rām, *Selections from Hindī Literature*, 7 vols. (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1921–26), 2, The Krishna Cult of Vraja, 5 f.; and L. S. S. O'Malley, *Popular Hinduism* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1935), pp. 89–91.



The movements of those who personate the deity and his fair companions are full of grace, and the dialogue is replete with harmony. The Chobis of Mat'hura and Vindravana have considerable reputation as vocalists; and the effect of the modulated and deep tones of the adult blending with the clear treble of the juvenile performers, while the time is marked by the cymbal or the soothing monotony of the tabor, accompanied by the *mūrali* or flute, is very pleasing.<sup>10</sup>

Tod's appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the *rāslīlā* is supported in another early description by Thomas Duer Broughton, commander of the bodyguard of the British resident at the camp of Mādhojī Sindhia. In a letter written from Rupaheli on the northern border of Udaypur territory on August 30, 1809, Mr. Broughton said that the Janmāshṭamī festival was at hand, and that the Mahārājā had erected a great tent for the performance of players who had just arrived from Mathurā :

They are boys, always Brahmuns, who are educated at Muttra for this purpose; where a large tract of land is appropriated for their support. Parties of them travel about at this season, to perform at the different Hindoo courts of India : that now in camp consists of four, besides the musicians; and all are eminently handsome.<sup>11</sup>

On the night of the festival, Broughton was among the invited guests in the Mahārājā's pavilion. He pictures the distinguished audience, the wide central aisle which served as a stage, and the action of the drama itself :

The performance was a kind of *Ballet*, descriptive of the sports of this amorous and inconstant, but interesting deity, with the *Gopees*, or virgins, of Gokul; during which they sung stanzas in the *B'hak'ha*, or language of *Brij*; the name by which the country for a certain distance around Muttra was formerly designated; and which was the scene of the early exploits of Krishna. This language, which is very little known among Europeans in general, is forcible and comprehensive; though, from abounding in monosyllables, it sounds harsh to ears unaccustomed to hear it pronounced.<sup>12</sup>

Broughton gives us in an ingenious translation some of the verses which were sung by the actors on that occasion. They are in the form of a dialogue—a saucy exchange between Kṛishṇa and the gopīs. The account ends with a general comment which is in full accord with the high opinion of Tod :

Both the dancing and singing of the *Rahus-d'harees* were far superior to that of common performers; their attitudes were exceedingly graceful; and their voices were never raised beyond the natural pitch. Their dresses were appropriate and elegant, especially that of Kunya; who wore a brilliant sun upon his head, and a quantity of superb jewels about his neck and breast; all of which, as well as the dresses of the other boys, were furnished from the wardrobe of the Muha Raj. After the dances were over, they exhibited in groups representations of the most celebrated statues of Krishna and his relatives, with an accuracy and steadiness quite surprising in such children. The instrumental performers who accompany the *Rahus-d'harees* are, as well as the boys themselves, all Brahmuns; and it was pleasing to

<sup>10</sup> James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1829), pp. 543 f. Tod assumes that the text of the drama was a Brajbhāshā version of the *Gītāgovinda* of Jayadeva, which he quotes extensively in the translation of Sir William Jones. The connection is mistaken. *Rāslīlā* players do not enact the *Gītāgovinda*. At most, the vocalists of the troupes sometimes put to choral use an isolated verse or two of its Sanskrit text.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Duer Broughton, *Letters Written in a Mahratta Camp During the Year 1809* (London, John Murray, 1813), p. 257, and colored lithograph.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

see them, after the performance, instead of making the usual obeisance, lifting up their little hands, as invoking a blessing upon the Muha Raj; who rose, and bowed to each as he retired. We quitted the tent soon after, highly gratified by the entertainment of the evening.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, these two early accounts attracted no lasting attention to the rāslīlā. The little mention which the rāslīlā received in works on the Indian drama was based upon remarks by two later writers, Horace Hayman Wilson and Frederick Salmon Growse. Wilson, author of the first full-scale Western work on the Hindu theater, set in motion in 1827 the notion that the rāslīlā is a pantomime: 'The Rāsa partakes more of the ballet, but it is accompanied also with songs, whilst the adventures of Krishna or Rāma are represented in appropriate costume, by measured gesticulations.'<sup>14</sup> This impression was strengthened fifty years later by Growse, who happened to see the one and only rāslīlā play which would confirm Wilson's statement. In his much-read work, *Mathurā: A District Memoir*, first published in 1874, Growse undertakes to explain from his experience as a district officer the meaning of the word *rāsdhārī*:

a *choragus* belonging to a class of Brāhmans residing chiefly in the villages of Karahla and Pisāyo, whose special occupation is to superintend the performance of the Rās Līlā. This is an unwritten religious drama, which represents the most popular incidents in the life of Krishna, and thus corresponds very closely with the Miracle Plays of Medieval Christianity. The complete series of representations extends over a month or more, each scene being acted on the very spot with which the original event is traditionally connected. The marriage scene, as performed at Sanket, is the only one that I have had the fortune to witness: with a garden-terrace for a stage, a grey stone temple for background, the bright moon overhead, and an occasional flambeau that shot a flickering gleam over the central tableau framed in its deep border of intent and sympathizing faces, the spectacle was a pretty one and was marked by a total absence of anything even verging on indecorum.<sup>15</sup>

Growse then tells of the role of the chief rāsdhārī in organizing the performances at the many country places on the banjātrā trail, and adds that the rāsdhārī himself 'takes the chief part in the performance, declaiming in set recitativo with the mandali for chorus, while the children who personate Rādhā and Krishna act only in dumb show'.<sup>16</sup>

Now, the principal actors in 'the marriage scene, as performed at Sanket' (see *Vivāha Līlā* on p. 177, No. 91) are mute, not because the rāslīlā as a whole is a dumb show, but because the bride and groom at a Hindu wedding are not more loquacious than the principals in other marriage rites. We have seen that the rāslīlā's actors in the time of Tod and Broughton used their voices, as they do now. But the earlier reports were forgotten, while

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 261 f.

<sup>14</sup> Horace Hayman Wilson, *Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus* (1st ed., 3 vols., Calcutta, Asiatic Press, 1827), I, ix.

<sup>15</sup> Growse, *Mathurā* (1st ed.), 2, 181.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

citations of Wilson and Growse kept alive for a century a belief in the 'Kṛishṇa pantomimes' of Mathurā.<sup>17</sup>

Tod, Broughton, and Growse were men of developed literary taste. Their unanimity in praising the rāslilā is impressive. The grace of the bodily action of the performers, the clarity and dignity of their speech, the elegance of their costumes, the soft modulation of their mingled voices—all these appreciative references become, cumulatively, a remarkable tribute. Had these accounts been given the notice they deserved, the world would have become aware earlier of the existence in Mathurā District of a local dramatic tradition of superior quality.

If the rāslilā can be said to be the property of the residents of Braj, then its custodians are the masters of the rāsmaṇḍalīs or troupes of actors of the rāslilā. The master of such a troupe is called *svāmī* or sometimes *rāsdhārī*, although this latter title can be extended to the other adults of his troupe also, or, in the plural, to the entire troupe collectively. Because of the extreme youth of most of the performers, the quality of the rāslilā is entirely dependent upon the sensitivity and skill of their trainers. In 1950 there were some twenty of these directors who were prominent captains in their profession.<sup>18</sup>

The *svāmī* is the proprietor and undisputed master of his troupe. The artists at his command must number at least ten. The first necessity is an orchestra (*saṃgīt samāj*) of at least four instrumentalists to play the *sāraṅgī*, the drums (*tablā* or *mṛidaṅg*), the cymbals (*jhāñjh*), and the harmonium. There must be *svarūps* to impersonate Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, and four actors to take the role of the *gopīs*. Prosperous troupes may add players of a second harmonium and a second *sāraṅgī*, a costumer and cosmetician (*śrīṅgārī*), and even a tutor for the children of the company. *Svāmī* Muralīdhar Bohre of Vṛindāban travels with a troupe of seventeen.

All *svāmīs* without exception are literate in Hindī and are able to recite Sanskrit verses. *Svāmī* Kishen Lāl is unusual in being able to read the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in Sanskrit with comprehension. *Svāmī* Rām Datt and *Svāmī*

<sup>17</sup> Christian Lassen, *Gita Govinda, Jayadevae Poetae Indici Drama Lyricum* (Bonn, Koenig et van Borcharen, 1836), p. vii; Christian Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde* (5 vols., London and Bonn, Williams and Norgate, H. B. Koenig, 1847–62), 2 (1852), 504 f. J. L. Klein, *Geschichte des Drama's* (Leipzig, T. O. Weigel, 1865), p. 97. J. Grosset, *Contribution à l'étude de la musique hindoue*, p. 16. Willem Caland, *Een onbekend Indisch tooneelstuk (gopālakellicandrikā)*, *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam*, Afdeeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel XVII, No. 3 (1917), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> The active *svāmīs* at the time of this study were Megh Śyām and Hardvārī Lāl of Karahlā, Fateh and Śyām of Khairā, Fateh Lāl and Mohan Lāl of Gauraulā, Fateh of Ciksaulī, Kuñvar Pāl of Chātā, Lakshmaṇ of Dhānsinghā, Rām Datt of Pisāyo, and Kishan Lāl, Kuñj Bihārī Lāl, Ghaṇśyām, Cet Rām, Dāmodar, Manohar, Muralīdhar Bohre, and Rāmji Lāl, mostly of Vṛindāban. Ojhā under 'Today's Rāsmaṇḍalīs,' pp. 532 f., adds the names of Jaggo Dholī of Karahlā, Ganesi and Hargovind of Muhammadpur, and Dharmśiṅha of Chātā. In addition to this list of twenty-one there is an unknown number of *rāsdhārīs* in the villages of Braj who are little known beyond their own neighborhoods and who never go out on tour.



Megh Śyām, the most advanced in formal education, have the equivalent of a high school diploma. The child actors must be literate in order to learn their lines efficiently. If any boy is unable to read when taken into a troupe, the svāmī teaches him or has him taught to the necessary level of proficiency. Thereafter the young actor's training is almost entirely in the texts of the plays. This specialized professional education produces youths who are steeped in the poetry of the Kṛishṇa cult but who lack most of the elements of a general education. Social reformers have often criticized the rāslīlā for its disorganization of the education of talented children.

Boys are recruited at the age of eight or ten. They usually begin their acting careers as impersonators of the gopīs. If they have good voices, good memories, and good looks, they may be promoted at the age of eleven or twelve to the roles of Rādhā or Kṛishṇa. Puberty brings their careers to an end. Most are then forced into an outside world for which their training has prepared them poorly. Those who have special musical talent sometimes remain in a troupe as instrumentalists and vocalists in the saṃgīt samāj. A few who have carefully memorized or written out all their master's dramas succeed in founding troupes of their own if they have in addition some savings, initiative, and organizing ability. Each 'graduating' actor is a potential svāmī.

Every svāmī would of course like to have his own son as his leading actor and ultimately as his successor. The universality of this aspiration is manifested in the frequency with which one sees toddlers playing about among the instruments of the orchestra at performances. The hope is that these small boys will absorb the dialogues and the spirit of the profession. At the end of infancy each will have his try at the stage by tripping the dances as the smallest of the gopīs. Ability is such an important requisite, however, that the hereditary principle cannot operate fully. A few families of Karahlā continue to be represented among the rāsdhārīs after the passage of a hundred years, but in general the list of sub-castes and of villages which are famed for activity in the rāslīlā has undergone great changes during that time. This is due to the fact that a svāmī must often turn, for the effective filling of important roles, to the children of distant relatives or of strangers.

Actors who are not members of the svāmī's family are engaged at an agreed monthly wage, sent regularly to their parents. Children must be given a vacation with their parents during the hot season of May and June. The earnings of actors range from Rs 25 monthly for the lesser gopīs to Rs 100 or more for a popular impersonator of Kṛishṇa in a famous troupe. The svāmī who must meet this payroll and train, house, and feed this band is the manager of a complex business enterprise.

It was possible to engage a rāsmaṇḍalī for a performance in Vṛindāban in 1950 for an honorarium ranging from Rs 15 to 50, depending on the size



and fame of the troupe. At times of pressure, troupes can, if necessary, give as many as three performances in one day. Svāmīs expect higher fees when on tour in outside regions. The patron is then expected to furnish food and lodging in addition. Kishen Lāl's practice is to perform on invitation and accept whatever the host may wish to give, but it is more general for the svāmī and patron to come to an agreement on an amount before the performance. The svāmīs receive in addition the offering of small coins dropped into the āratī tray by the guests at the close of each performance. Gifts given to actors at any other time are considered personal gifts to the recipient.

The rāslilā's own special stage is a circular platform of stone or concrete, standing three feet or less above the level of the ground, and broad enough to provide dancing space for eight persons in a roomy circle (see Plate Vb). Such a dancing-platform is called a *rāsmaṇḍal*. (The name is applied also to the circle of dancers and to the circular dance seen in the performances.) These stages stand out-of-doors, wall-less, and open to the sky. The form of the stage reflects the importance of the circular dance as a component of the rāslilā. The rāsmaṇḍal provides a smooth round masonry floor, broken only at one margin by a dais (*raṅgmaṇḍ*) on which Kṛishṇa and the gopīs rest during certain rituals and in the intervals of their dance. When, as at Vṛindāban, the stone floor is exceptionally broad, spectators sit on mats on the outer border of the platform itself. At smaller installations the audience is accommodated wholly or mainly on the surrounding earth. So far as the author knows, this circular stage is peculiar to the rāslilā. In theory these rāsmaṇḍals are built only in spots where Kṛishṇa himself once danced the rās. Hence almost all of them are found in Braj at the stations of the banjātrā pilgrimage trail which meanders to the scenes of Kṛishṇa's major exploits. In all other places where the rāslilā may be performed, rāsmaṇḍals are not available, and a stage is improvised.

The usual setting is the courtyard of a temple or the home of a wealthy Vaishṇava householder. In a private home the playing-space is laid out on a wide veranda or in a living room or inner courtyard or grassy garden nook. Because the onlookers sit on the floor or earth and seldom number more than two hundred, a raised platform is not necessary in order to maintain visibility. The stage is merely a large white sheet, put down atop a coarse matting of cotton or jute.

Everything needed for furnishing this Vaishṇava theater can be carried in one trunk. The essentials are the floor coverings mentioned, a smaller cloth for use as a curtain, and a few bright and rich spreads for a royal seat. The other requirements can be improvised from the furnishings of any middle-class Hindu home. The one necessary piece of stage furniture is a dais with a throne (*siṅhāsan*) erected upon it. So a *takht* is brought—the hard

wooden bed on which people sleep in the humid rainy season. It is placed at the rear edge of the spread-out floor covering. Draped with cloth, it becomes the *raṅgmaṇḍ* or dais. This small platform is used only as a base for the throne of the deities and as a sitting place for the *gopīs* who cluster around their feet. The double-seated throne which is raised on it often consists of two chairs placed side by side, or even a bench, covered with the most luxurious cloths available. On this dais the *svarūps*, surrounded by the *gopīs*, always present themselves in formal pose for the worshipful gaze of the audience at the beginning and end of each performance.

The curtain is used only to provide occasional privacy for the actors when sitting on the dais. It is seldom strung on a cord or wire. When the costume or ornaments of an actor must be changed or restored to order or when a tableau must be prepared, two attendants hold the cloth across the front of the platform long enough to conceal the operation. The curtain is never used to separate the playing-space from the audience. Since the spectators surround the arena of action on three sides, such shielding would be practically impossible.

Stage settings are provided almost entirely by the imagination of the spectators. The white ground-sheet becomes now the floor of a cottage or palace, now the surface of a highway or a grassy pasture, without interruption or commotion. When Kṛishṇa leaves the family kitchen to go out with the herds, he simply walks out into the forestage while Mother Yaśodā at rear quietly slips away with her cooking utensils in her hands. The *siṅhāsan* is used when a *rājā* is to be shown in his throneroom. When a holy man is to be visited in the middle of the forest, he is shown sitting on the plain dais from which the royal seats have been removed. When such temporal or spiritual dignitaries are scheduled to appear, attendants a few moments in advance hold the curtain over the dais, and in its privacy the king or ascetic takes the appropriate kind of seat, on which he is then revealed. Long journeys can be made entirely within the limits of the arena. Uddhav may say farewells to the people of Vṛindāban at rear left and complete a trip to Mathurā by making a slow circuit of the stage. While the round is being made, Kṛishṇa mounts the *siṅhāsan* with the help of the curtain and is ready to greet Uddhav, when he comes around, in the throneroom in Mathurā. A branch is set upright on the stage when a tree is needed. In the *Cīrharāṇ Līlā* Kṛishṇa hangs the clothes of the bathing *gopīs* on it, and in the *Kālīnāg Līlā* it is from a stool concealed in such a tree that Kṛishṇa jumps down into the imaginary waters of the poisonous pool below. Exits are made by stepping into an adjoining room, where one is available. Where there is none, the actor merely takes a step into the audience and sits down.

Personal properties are not left to the imagination. Kṛishṇa carries his flute, or a walking-cane. Herdsmen lean upon their staves. Rājās display

their glittering weapons. The gopīs carry real milk-pots on their heads. The costuming is complete and elaborate.

The costume of Kṛishṇa (see Plate Vd) sets him off sharply from mortals of all kinds. His ankle-bells (*nūpur* or *ghuṅgarū*), which give jingling notice of his presence or approach, are of the type worn by mortal dancers, and the *cūṛidār pāyjamā* which protect his legs are a familiar human garment, but the full high-waisted silken skirt called *kaṭakāchanī*, which Kṛishṇa always wears in the rās dances and often in the subsequent part of the drama as well, is unique and peculiar to himself. This has been Kṛishṇa's dress for at least two centuries.<sup>19</sup> The skirt is secured just under the armpits by a sash (*paṭakā*). It falls almost to the ankles in four or five wide bands divided by ruffles. The rainbow colors of these horizontal bands are dominated by blue and purple. In the songs of the drama the prevailing bluish tone of this skirt is often compared to the blue of the peacock plumes which Kṛishṇa wears on his crown. In a peacock-dance which Kṛishṇa sometimes performs on the stage, he holds the rear of this skirt aloft to represent the peacock's fan-shaped tail. Images of Kṛishṇa in temples are said to be dressed in this *kaṭakāchanī* particularly on the *rāspūrṇimā*, the anniversary of his dance with the gopīs. On the stage, Kṛishṇa usually exchanges this skirt, in the latter part of the performance, for a full-cut yellow dhotī called a *pītāṃbar*. Kṛishṇa's upper garment is always a tight-fitting long-sleeved shirt of a special design. Several strings of small white beads are always seen around his neck as well as one or more garlands of flowers. Sometimes the garland is his own long *banmālā*, made of large varicolored flowers which Kṛishṇa is supposed to have plucked in the forest.

Kṛishṇa's special headdress, the *mormukūṭ*, is a complex and interesting structure. Its foundation is a small turban (*pāg*), to which the other elements are attached. From each side, several locks of false hair (*laṭ*) fall down below the shoulder. A cockade of peacock feathers is thrust into the folds of the turban on the right side. A gilded tiara sits on the brow and above the ears; strings of pearl beads or of tiny flowers hang in loops along its lower edge. The dominant feature of the entire headdress is a large spade-shaped crest which extends upward and forward from the head. The stem of this crest is attached to the side of a cone, the base of which sits upon the turban and is lashed to it. Actors adhering to the Vallabha Sampradāya wear this crest sloped toward the left, whereas those belonging to the Nimbārka and Gauṛiyā sects slant it toward the right. The face of the crest is perforated in patterns

<sup>19</sup> O. C. Gangoly, 'A Group of Vallavāchārya or Nāth-dwāra Paintings and their Relatives,' *Bulletin of the Baroda State Museum and Picture Gallery*, I, pt. II (1944), pp. 31-46, pl. III, dated c. A.D. 1750. For earlier evidences, see C. L. Fabri, 'Ballet Costume in Akbar's Time,' *Marg*, 7 (December 1953), pp. 17-22.



and studded with gems.<sup>20</sup> A puzzling strip of black cloth is attached to the crown of the turban and hangs down the actor's back to the hips. It is a triangular pennant, about six inches wide where it is joined to the turban. Silver threads cross it transversely in the form of chevrons or zigzag lines, and the whole is spangled with lozenges, cubes, or floral medallions of silver. The shape and ornamentation of this appendage suggest rather obviously the body and markings of a snake. Although it is called a *coṭī* and is said to represent Kṛishṇa's queue, it seems likely to have originated either as a token of Kṛishṇa's triumph over the serpent Kālīya or as a token of some obscure rapprochement with the nāga cult which was once prominent in Braj.<sup>21</sup>

Half an hour is needed before each performance for the applying of ornaments and facial decorations. The impersonators of the gopīs wear simple tiaras, modest necklaces and garlands, and a pearl nose pendant (*bulāk*). A thin solution of sandalwood paste is applied in various patterns to the faces of all the children, leaving bright yellow lines on the skin (see Plate Va). The tracery is sometimes stuccoed while damp with glittering flakes of glass. There is no great uniformity or continuity in the pattern of these decorations, nor can the rāsdhārīs explain them in terms of any symbolism.

One who arrives early at the scene of a rāslīlā performance finds servants spreading out the floor-coverings and draping the seats that are to become the throne of the deities. The musicians file in and deposit their instruments in a line at the forward edge of the gathering audience. The player of the sārāṅgī takes a seat facing the throne, leans his instrument against his shoulder and tunes the strings with a wooden key. The drummer keeps tapping the blocks on the side of his mṛdaṅg until its leather membranes give out sounds which match certain notes of the harmonium. The actors enter in a body. If the performance is being held out-of-doors, they are always carried in on the shoulders of the devotees who constantly hover about the svarūps seeking opportunities to do them personal service. When the spectators see the first glimmer of the shining crowns of the entering deities, they rise and greet them

<sup>20</sup> The crest appears on Viṣṇu images of the Kushan period in Mathurā Museum exhibits 953, 1010, 2487, and 2520. The modern headdress and other items of costume may also be seen in William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, pp. 173–75, 180, 201 f.

<sup>21</sup> Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī pointed out in this connection a common South Indian bronze figurine in which Kṛishṇa stands in triumph on the head of Kālīya, holding up that serpent's tail at full length. [See O. C. Gangoly, *South Indian Bronzes* (Calcutta, Indian Society of Oriental Art, 1915), pls. LXVI, LXVII.] W. Norman Brown, *Eastern Art*, 2 (1930), pp. 195 f., fig. 17, reproduces an illustration in a fifteenth-century manuscript in which a Vaiṣṇava painter shows Śiva bearing the serpent Śeṣha on his head with its tail protruding backward in a manner suggesting this pennant. A photograph in C. Evelyn Hutchinson, *The Clear Mirror* (Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 78, pl. XII, shows a trailing headdress worn by female dancers at Hemis Monastery in Ladakh, similar to this *coṭī* in position, shape, and pattern, in which the reference to a serpent is unmistakable.



with a shout of 'Śrī Laṛlīlāl kī jay!' Rādhā and Kṛishṇa mount the high throne. The gopīs take lower positions at their side and around their feet. The svarūps having seated themselves, the audience may now do likewise.

Strict rules of decorum govern the behavior of the audience at the rāslīlā. As at other Vaishṇava theatricals, only women, girls, and little boys may sit in the space at the front of the theater to the right of the stage. Of course no one brings shoes or sandals into the meeting-place. Onlookers should sit with their feet folded respectfully beneath them, not exposing the soles of their feet to the view of the svarūps. Anyone who must leave the theater during the performance must back or sidle out in such a way as to avoid turning his back on the actor-deities. A Hindī leaflet distributed by Svāmī Muralīdhar Bohre during a stay in Calcutta in 1946 instructs prospective patrons thus :

Rules of the rās: smoking *bīṛīs* or cigarettes, sitting on chairs, using cushions and pillows, departing by way of the playing space, making commotion and noise and so forth—all these things are politely but firmly prohibited. If any other gentlemen wish the rās to be enacted at their homes, it can be done, but the rules written above will have to be observed.

Vaishṇava opinion takes these rules seriously. Once at a performance held alongside a country lane, the author saw a passing cowherd edge up to the outer circle of the crowd, still puffing on a cigarette. The svāmī stopped the performance instantly and rebuked the offender in a way which sent him off covered with shame. The people who attend the rāslīlā are one of the most silent, attentive, and disciplined audiences to be found anywhere in India.

As we approach a discussion of the performance itself, it is well to ensure our grasp of certain Vaishṇava theological convictions which illumine the spirit and message of the plays. The Vaishṇavas of Braj are unashamedly, enthusiastically theistic. They resent the doubt cast by the school of Śaṅkara on the reality of the characteristics of Kṛishṇa just as he is pictured in their scriptures. They do not merely tolerate the human qualities of their deity : They rejoice in them. The very foibles and naughtinesses of the child Kṛishṇa are to them a revelation, not an obscuration, of the divine nature, and to celebrate them and delight in them is the very way of salvation.

Since the human traits of Kṛishṇa are accepted so positively, it follows that the dramas can often emphasize aspects of the divine personality which are seldom stressed in more transcendentalistic theisms. The awesome power and 'otherness' of Kṛishṇa is only a minor theme. In the theology of the *Bāl-kṛishṇa* cult and in these plays the stress falls upon one aspect or another of the deity's beauty and charm. The *Madhurāshṭakam* hymn of Vallabhācārya has given famous expression to this concentration upon the perfect beauty, handsome appearance, and winsome ways of the god :

Sweet are the lips, sweet the face,  
sweet the eyes, sweet the smile,  
Sweet the heart and sweet the motion—  
complete is the sweetness of the Lord of Sweetness !

Sweet the words, sweet the deeds,  
 sweet the clothes, sweet the pose,  
 Sweet the gait and sweet the roaming—  
 complete is the sweetness of the Lord of Sweetness!<sup>22</sup>

The charm of Kṛishṇa is celebrated particularly in two of his aspects: the adorable mischievous child and the all-captivating romantic lover. The first dominates those plays which are said to be filled with the *vātsalyarasa*, the adoring mood of a delighted adult who dotes upon a fascinating child. The worshiper of the Bālkṛishṇa finds nothing irreverent in the stage presentation of Kṛishṇa as a waggish little prankster, a homesick boy, or an artless adolescent in the first throes of puppy love. To perceive that deep religious feeling can thrive upon such lore, one needs but to sit amidst an audience which follows the attractive antics of the small Kṛishṇa in such a drama as the *Svapna Līlā* (see p. 178, No. 106).

Even more prominent in the *rāslīlā* is the sentiment called *mādhuryarasa*, the approach in which Kṛishṇa is viewed as the absolutely desirable object of a love which can be at least compared with the romantic love between man and woman. The stories of Kṛishṇa's luring the gopīs with his flute and lavishing his affection upon them in the *rās* dance are viewed with delight, both as opportunities for a detached contemplation of the ideal charm of the god, and as renewed assurance of a loving relation between the deity and one's self. For the serious devotee thinks of himself as being in reality a gopī like those being represented on the stage. Kṛishṇa with his bewitching distant notes calls him, too, to the tryst where his utmost longings will be satisfied in a direct personal relationship. Or, under the indirect and partial influence of the tantric world view, he may conceive himself as a privileged viewer of the cosmic dalliance of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. Strange as these concepts may be to adherents of sterner faiths, they must be understood to be the focus of adoration for devotees of Kṛishṇa whose theology stresses neither his power nor righteousness but his beauty. Dramas which celebrate this characteristic can be and are viewed in a spirit which is not worldly but worshipful.

The analysis of a *rāslīlā* performance must begin with notice of its two radically different parts, the *rās* and the *līlā*. The *rās* portion, so named

<sup>22</sup> Ochhavlāl Mohanlāl Shāh, ed., *Vallabhasudhā* (Dohad, Lālchand Chhaganlāl Shāh, 1959), p. 9:

Adharaṃ madhuraṃ vadanaṃ madhuraṃ  
 nayanaṃ madhuraṃ hasitaṃ madhuraṃ  
 Hṛidayaṃ madhuraṃ gamanaṃ madhuraṃ  
 madhurādhīpaterakhilaṃ madhuraṃ.  
 Vacanaṃ madhuraṃ caritaṃ madhuraṃ  
 vasanaṃ madhuraṃ valitaṃ madhuraṃ  
 Calitaṃ madhuraṃ bhramitaṃ madhuraṃ  
 madhurādhīpaterakhilaṃ madhuraṃ . . .

because its principal feature is the set of dances called the *rās*, is a ritual re-enactment of the most sacred of all Kṛishṇaite stories, the incident of Kṛishṇa's dance with the *gopīs*. This dance alone can be called the *rāslīlā* also, since the dancing of the *rās* was one of Kṛishṇa's *līlās* or sportive acts. But it is conventional and also convenient to use the term *rās* as a specific designation for only the initial portion of the performance and to reserve the word *līlā* for the latter part of the drama, which deals with any one of a great number of Kṛishṇa's *līlās* and which cannot, therefore, be indicated by any single proper name. Thus we have in the *rāslīlā* a coupling of an enactment of the moonlight dance of Kṛishṇa with a dramatization of some other deed of his. There is no continuity of substance between these two parts of the performance, but they are supplemental in their emotional effect. The *rās*, which occupies the first third of a performance lasting somewhat over two hours, focuses attention and initiates the flow of feeling by rehearsing an ever-beloved theme. It prepares its viewers for listening to less familiar material with appreciation.

The *rās* part of a *rāslīlā* is itself complex, having six or seven principal elements. Some have traditional names, but for others names have had to be improvised :

1. *Maṅgalācaraṇ*
2. *Āratī*
3. *Gopī-prārthanā*
4. Petition to Rādhā to dance the *rās*
5. The *rās* dances (which take ten forms, or more)
6. Concluding hymn or hymns
7. *Pravacan* (sometimes omitted)

We shall describe these elements now as they unfold in a typical performance.

#### 1. *Maṅgalācaraṇ*

For some minutes after the actors have entered the theater, they sit quietly on the dais, giving darśan to their devotees. During this calm period the *svāmī* of the troupe sings a song of praise or invocation known as the *maṅgalācaraṇ*. If the troupe is in no hurry to finish the performance, other musicians may contribute additional songs of the same sort. The literature of Braj-bhāshā devotional poetry suitable for this purpose is vast but largely unpublished. The simple example below was sung by Svāmī Dāmodar at Baṅsībat in Vṛindāban on October 29, 1949:

श्री ब्रज राज कुमार वर गाइये  
आनन्द की निधि वर गाइये ।  
भक्तन को मन भावतो गाइये  
श्री लाइलीललन वर गाइये ॥

Sing the praise of the excellent Prince of Braj !  
Sing of that excellent Ocean of Bliss !  
Sing of him who is pleasing to devotees' hearts.  
Sing the praise of the excellent darling girl and charming boy !

## 2. Ārati

As the maṅgalācaraṇ comes to a close, an attendant brings in a brass tray strewn with flower petals. It bears a small oil lamp with one or more flaming wicks, or on occasion, an upturned cluster of burning incense sticks. A gopī steps forth from her seat and receives the plate. Standing before Kṛishṇa and Rādhā, she waves it about in a vertical plane.<sup>23</sup> The audience rises to its feet as this ceremony begins. The gopī joins with the musicians of the troupe in singing an ārati song, of which the following is representative :

आरती युगल किशोर की कीजै  
तन मन धन न्योछावर कीजै ॥  
गौर बरन वृषभानु किशोरी  
सांवरी सूरत कुञ्ज बिहारी ॥  
रास बिहार को रस ही पीजै  
आरती युगल किशोर की कीजै ॥  
परमानन्द प्रभु अविचल जोई २  
चिरजीवौ राधा और मोहन ॥  
रसिक जनन की अैसी बन ठन  
निरखत नयन सफल कर लीजै ॥  
आरती युगल किशोर की कीजै ॥<sup>24</sup>

Perform the flame-worship of the Youthful Pair !  
Offer up body, mind, and wealth !  
Light of hue is Vṛishabhānu's daughter,  
Dusky the face of the Sporter in the Groves.  
Drink in the very nectar of the enjoyment of romance !  
Perform the flame-worship of the Youthful Pair !  
May they who are the supremely blissful unchanging Lords,  
May they who are the supremely blissful unchanging Lords,  
May Rādhā and Mohan live long !  
See such decoration as that of the Romantic Ones  
And bring fruition to your eyes !  
Perform the flame-worship of the Youthful Pair !

## 3. Gopī-prārthanā

The gopīs now descend to the floor and stand before Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, two on each side of the throne (see Plate VIa). One of them addresses Kṛishṇa in words that never vary :

<sup>23</sup> In the Sanskrit drama, *Gopālakelicandrikā*, Kṛishṇa on entering is accorded a ceremony similar to this under the name *nirājana*. See Caland, pp. 9, 48.

<sup>24</sup> This and subsequent songs of the rās are given as recorded by Svāmī Kuṇvar Pāl and transcribed by Govind Dās Gupta, M.A.



*Āj nitya ke rās bihār kau samay hvai gayau hai. So kṛipā karke rāsmaṇḍal meṇ padhārau !*

Today the time for the regular rās sport has come. So graciously betake yourself to the rās circle !

To this Kṛishṇa replies, '*Achau, sakhī!*' or 'Very well, friend !'

#### 4. *Petition to Rādhā to dance the rās*

Having agreed to dance the rās, Kṛishṇa now turns to Rādhā to ask her company. Commonly he does so in the following song and prose speech :

चलहु किशोरी रस रास मञ्जारी  
तू ही मेरौ जीवन धन भानु की दुलारी ॥  
तुम ही हो श्री बन सम्पति स्वरूपा  
राग अलापत तान अनूपा ॥  
चलौ प्यारी सुकुमारी हौं चेरौ बलिहारी २  
चलौ किशोरी रस रास मञ्जारी  
तू ही मेरौ जीवन धन भानु की दुलारी ॥

हे प्यारी जू आपके नित्य रास कौ समय ह्वै गयौ है । कृपा करके आप रास में पधारौ ।

Come along, maiden, into the romantic rās !  
It is thou who art the wealth of my life,  
O Darling Daughter of Vṛishabhānu !  
The embodiment of Vrindāban's treasure art thou,  
Reciting the songs in matchless tunes.  
Come, dear, thou delicate one ! I am thy slave, thy admirer !  
Come, dear, thou delicate one ! I am thy slave, thy admirer !  
Come along, maiden, into the romantic rās !  
Thou art the wealth of my life,  
O Darling Daughter of Vṛishabhānu !

The time of your regular rās has come, dear ; graciously betake yourself to the rās !

Rādhā then agrees to join Kṛishṇa in the dance, usually expressing her willingness in a song full of endearments to which Kṛishṇa responds in kind. The two rise, step down to the floor, and form a line with the gopīs at the base of the throne. All the while, the couple continue to address each other in song. The following lines are often sung by Rādhā while accepting the invitation to the rās :<sup>25</sup>

धन्य धन्य मम प्राण प्यारे ॥  
मम मन नित उत्साह रहै अति  
रसिक शिरोमणि रस विस्तारे ॥  
रसिक शिरोमणि रसिक शिरोमणि रस विस्तारे ॥  
ब्रज युवतिन के यूथ संग लै वृन्दावन मिल करहु बिहारे ॥  
धन्य धन्य

<sup>25</sup> Ojhā, p. 94, reproduces a different song, used at this point, in which Rādhā responds at first with a saucy, 'I'll not go with you to the grove, you naughty Girdhārī.'

सब साजन को कहें ललितादिक २  
 नूपुर की पद में मुख धारे ॥  
 धन्य धन्य मम प्राण प्यारे ॥  
 मुख ही से संगीत गान कर  
 रसिकन को सुख उपजै भारे ॥  
 चलो चलें अब मण्डल चलियै २  
 चल करिये अब लाड़ली पीतम  
 करहु प्रेम रस बन बरसारे ॥  
 धन्य धन्य मम प्राण प्यारे ॥

Thank you, thank you, O thou Dear-as-my-life !  
 In my heart enthusiasm always dwells in abundance,  
 O thou diadem-jewel among lovers, thou diffuser of romance !  
 O thou diadem-jewel among lovers, thou diffuser of romance !  
 Take along the crowd of Braj damsels, meet at Vrindāban, do the sports !  
 Thank you, thank you !

Let Lalitā and the others all speak to their Lover,  
 Let Lalitā and the others all speak to their Lover,  
 Placing their faces on his belled feet,  
 ' Thank you, thank you, O thou Dear-as-my-life ! '

Singing music with the voice.  
 For romantic folk great joy will spring up.  
 Come, let us go ; please come now to the circle !  
 Come, let us go ; please come now to the circle !  
 Come, please do it now, Dear Girl, Dear Boy !  
 Make the nectar of love rain down upon the forest !  
 Thank you, thank you, O thou Dear-as-my-life !

Sometimes while singing this or a similar song, the line of actors repeatedly advances into the stage a few steps and retreats to the original position. The players of some troupes march smartly across the stage at each refrain, whirl, and return. When this song is finished, the preliminaries are over, and the rās dances are ready to begin.

##### 5. *The rās dances*

The dances themselves are complex activities that can be divided into about ten elements, a few of which are sometimes omitted. The rāsdhārīs whom the author consulted were unable to supply traditional names for them. It has been necessary to invent the following English designations :

- A. The open circle
- B. The closed circle
- C. The mimicking of Kṛishṇa
- D. The three hops
- E. Kṛishṇa's solo dance on his knees
- F. The adjusting of Rādhā's ornaments
- G. The promenade
- H. The whirling of partners

## I. The dalliance of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa

## J. The clapping circle

In addition there are two or three rare dances that the svāmī may present if he wishes.

The rāsdhārīs offer no developed theory to explain and justify the form of these dances, but it is clear from their appearance that they are intended to represent the romps of a group of children. The general belief is that these forms are followed because Kṛishṇa sported thus. The dances are not, however, a serious attempt to reconstruct Kṛishṇa's dance from the descriptions given in the texts of the Bhāgavata, Viṣṇu, and Harivaṃśa Purāṇas. Now and then a phrase from these works can be connected with a particular dance, but the correspondences are neither continuous nor clear.

The dancers trip through their formations in an informal spirit of fun. They do not seem intent upon technical precision. Since the younger performers are about eight years old, the movements must be simple. The tinier dancers often merely flap their arms broadly as they move about the stage, but older players sometimes execute the shifts of arm position with a precise co-ordination that is very pleasing. Use is made of almost none of the hand and finger symbols (mudrā or cihn) belonging to the code of India's classical dance. Now and then, while singing a song, Kṛishṇa may raise the little finger of his left hand as a reference to his lifting of Mount Govardhan; or he may assume the teaching pose, holding up his right hand with thumb and index finger pressed together.

A. *The open circle*

The line of dancers follows Kṛishṇa out into the arena, trailing after him in a file. The file bends, closes, and becomes a circle. To the music of the orchestra and of their own singing, they go round and round in a clockwise direction. This dance has a distinctive arm movement. One arm, straightened, is extended sideward at full length, and the other, elbow bent, is folded over the chest or brow in the same lateral direction (see Plate VIb). As a variation, the hand of the bent arm is sometimes rested on the hip. The feet are advanced to a timing of one, two, three, four, and on the count of four the moving foot, after only half a step, is brought down beside the stationary one with a force which causes a sharp swell in the sound of the ankle bells. At a certain point in the rhythm the dancers reverse with a snap the positions of their two arms. After several circuits of the stage, the dancers whirl sharply as a unit and reverse their direction.

B. *The closed circle*

Continuing the form and direction of the open circle, the dancers now grasp each other's hands (see Plate VIc). They trip about now much like a group of Western children playing Ring-around-a-rosy.

On the occasions when the drama of the day is the *Mahārās Līlā*, the circle of dancers is augmented by several additional impersonators of Kṛishṇa, so that there may be a Kṛishṇa between each pair of gopīs. At certain turns of this special variation of the closed-circle dance there is still another Kṛishṇa-svarūp in the midst of this enlarged circle, now alone and again with Rādhā, playing his flute.<sup>26</sup> In other respects the dances at the time of the *Mahārās* show no important difference.

The orchestra plays continuously throughout all the dances. The bell-like clashes of the small cymbals (*jhāñjh*) pace the growth of the excitement, dominating the other instruments increasingly as the participants accelerate the dance to an ecstatic climax. Steady amidst the fluctuating volume of the instrumental music is the voice of the svāmī singing verses in which the actors sometimes join. If the dancers have not finished their round when the svāmī comes to the end of his text, he continues his accompaniment as long as necessary merely by repeating the final lines over and over. In such songs as this, a *bol*, a combination of nonsense syllables which regulates the steps of dance, is a common element:<sup>27</sup>

नाचै छबीलौ ब्रजराज ॥ छनन ॥ २  
 ता ता थेई ता ता थेई चरण चपल आली  
 नाचै छबीलौ ब्रजराज ॥ छनन ॥  
 सजनी रजनी सजनी रजनी रजनी  
 सरद सरस ऋतु आज सरद  
 नन्दनन्दन संग आली ॥  
 नाचै छबीलौ ब्रजराज ॥ छनन ॥ २  
 ता ता थेई ता ता थेई चरण चपल आली ॥

The handsome King of Braj is dancing. Chanan!<sup>28</sup>  
 The handsome King of Braj is dancing. Chanan!  
 With a tā tā thei, tā tā thei, the Nimble-footed One, O girl-friend!  
 The handsome King of Braj is dancing. Chanan!  
 Sweetheart, it is night. Sweetheart, it is night, night!  
 It is the autumn, the romantic season, the autumn tonight!  
 Dance with the Son of Nand, O girl-friend!  
 The handsome King of Braj is dancing. Chanan!  
 With a tā tā thei, tā tā thei, the Nimble-footed One, O girl-friend!

### C. The mimicking of Kṛishṇa

The performers in the circle release each other's hands and spin about individually in rapid whirls. Then all sink to their knees, facing inward toward Kṛishṇa, who is kneeling at the base of the dais with his back toward it. In

<sup>26</sup> The circle as seen in the *Mahārās* is pictured in Ridgeway, p. 180, fig. 30.

<sup>27</sup> On *bols* see above, pp. 35, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Onomatopoeia. *Chanan* imitates the throbbing of the ankle bells when the dancers stamp their feet in doubled time.



## PLATES



*Plate I.* Sītā and Rām Enthroned

The happy conclusion of the Rāmāyaṇa story, enacted on the final night of the Rām Līlā performances in Mathurā



*Plate II. A Jhānkī Exhibition*



2b



2d



2e



3a



3b



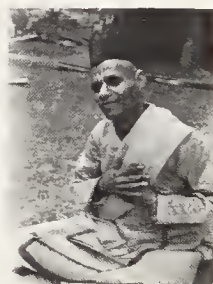
3c



3d



5a



5b



5c



6c



6d



8b



8c



9b

*Plate III-A. Kathak Gestures*

The gestures are labeled to correspond to the descriptions in Chapter 2.





9b



10c



11b



12b



13a



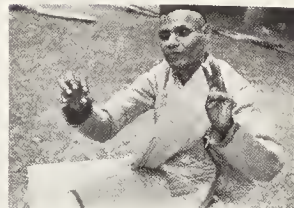
13b



13c



15a



15c



18b



18d



19a



20b



21a

*Plate III-B. Kathak Gestures*

The gestures are labeled to correspond to the descriptions in Chapter 2.



a



b

*Plate IV. Technique of the Rām Līlā*

While the combat between Rāvaṇ and Hanumān is being enacted in mid-stage (a), the Paṇḍit (b) sings out the appropriate verses from the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās.





a



b



c

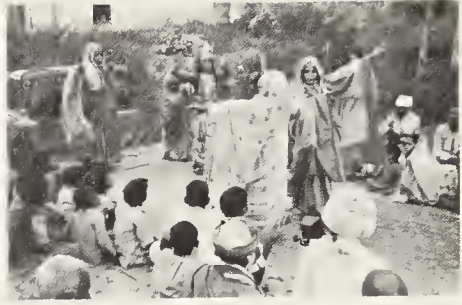


d

*Plate V.* (a) Facial decoration (*mukh śṛiṅgār*) for the Rās Līlā  
 (b) A *rāsmaṇḍal*, the Rās Līlā's own proper stage  
 (c) Orchestra: *sārāṅgī*, harmonium, *mṛidaṅg* and *jhāñjh*  
 (d) Costume of Kṛishṇa and the gopīs in the rāsa dance



a



b



c



d



e



f

*Plate VI.* Elements of the Rās

- (a) The *gopīprarthanā*
- (b) The open circle
- (c) The closed circle
- (d) The mimicking of Kṛishṇa
- (e) The three hops
- (f) The knee dance



a sport much like the children's game of follow-the-leader, Kṛishṇa now assumes various poses which the gopīs must imitate (see Plate VIId). Kṛishṇa flutters his hands in a distinctive manner; he leans forward on his knees and arches his eyebrows in a mischievous way; he oscillates his neck; and he stands and makes a strumming motion with his hands as if playing a stringed instrument. The gopīs ape these actions as he does them. The circle then breaks up.

#### D. *The three hops*

Again the dancers draw themselves up in a line at the base of the throne. Kṛishṇa steps out, crosses the stage, turns about to face the gopīs, and squats down. Now, without fully straightening his body and with his feet together, he returns across the stage in three long froglike hops, rejoining the line of the gopīs (see Plate VIe). Rādhā crosses the stage and returns in the same fashion. Then each of the other gopīs takes a turn. The inexperienced eight-year-olds may do no more than skip back across the stage. Kṛishṇa then repeats his hops. For variation he sometimes hobbles on one knee or covers the length of the stage by turning cartwheels.

#### E. *Kṛishṇa's solo dance on his knees*

Kṛishṇa steps forth from the base line, kneels, and gathers up in his hands the filmy skirts of his silk kaṭākāchanī. Whirling round and round on his knees, he launches out on a circuit of the stage. The rousing percussion of the cymbals heightens in tempo and the spinning dancer gathers speed. At the right moment he releases the edges of the light skirt. It billows out into an undulating rainbow-colored disk on which he seems to float around the stage (see Plate VIIf). He makes three circuits in a clockwise direction and rejoins the line of applauding gopīs amidst shouts of 'Śrī Bihārījī kī jay jay!' from the crowd. This dance is sometimes omitted; not all troupes have a chief actor who can perform it successfully.

#### F. *The adjusting of Rādhā's ornaments*

Rādhā retires from the floor to rest on the throne. Kṛishṇa follows, half-kneels before her on the seat, and rearranges the stray locks of her hair. He puts in order any garlands, necklaces, or other ornaments that may have become disarranged during the preceding dances.

#### G. *The promenade*

Rādhā and Kṛishṇa come down and rejoin the row of dancers. All the actors place their arms across each other's necks, forming a straight unbroken line with Rādhā and Kṛishṇa in the middle. As a solid rank they tour the stage, wheeling this way and that in gliding sweeps.

#### H. *The whirling of partners*

The rank of actors breaks up into three couples—Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, and two pairs of gopīs. The partners stand toe to toe, cross their forearms, and

grasp each other's hands. Then they swing each other about with the utmost possible speed.<sup>29</sup> Out of breath, all fling themselves on the dais to rest while the svāmī sings a song.

### I. *The dalliance of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa*

The actors stand and re-form their line. Rādhā and Kṛishṇa take a step forward, face each other, and carry on a flirtatious exchange in song. The author kept notes on one occasion, when the gist of the dialogue was as follows: Kṛishṇa, singing, begs Rādhā to come and play with him. Rādhā retorts, 'You are a naughty boy. I don't want to play with you.' Kṛishṇa stands before her and puts on a display for her benefit—a stationary dance of stamps and spins and twirling of the hands. Rādhā matches each of his motions with a countermotion, at first defiantly, but with increasing pleasure. Kṛishṇa pauses in the dance to sing, 'Your face is like a lily.' (He touches her chin.) 'You have eyes like a lotus. It is by your grace alone that I am called by the name of The Sporter in the Groves. I am ready to offer myself as a sacrifice for your sake.' Kṛishṇa gazes at her fondly and crosses his little fingers in token of affection. Rādhā is won over. She gives him her arm and they make a promenade of the stage together. They pause back-to-back and cast tender glances over their shoulders. Both bend backward, and each touches a hand to the other's chin. On several other occasions the actors have been seen to embrace at this point by pressing shoulders together—right shoulder to right shoulder, then left to left. This is the fullest expression of the erotic spirit which the author has seen in the rāslīlā.

### J. *The clapping circle*

This may merely be a repetition of the open-circle dance, but it usually differs from it in that the time is kept by the clapping of the actors' hands. The beating of the time is done with long sweeps of the arm which meet the opposing hand in a percussion near the thigh. This completes the series of dances almost always seen in the course of the rās.<sup>30</sup> We return now to our survey of the more variegated elements.

<sup>29</sup> Illustrated in the design at the head of this chapter. Cf. the *Phugadī* in A. J. Agarkar, *Folk-dance of Maharashtra* (Bombay, Rajabhai Joshi, 1950), pp. 65 f., and pl. 21.

<sup>30</sup> At least three other dances are seen occasionally: (1) A formation similar to that in the child's game of London Bridge, in which a file of dancers passes under a human arch. (2) *Daṇḍe kā rās*. The four participants hold a rod in each hand. Each leans to one side and strikes his rods against those of his neighbor in that direction, next clicks his own two rods together, and then strikes the rods of his neighbor on the other side. There are a number of variations. Cf. the *ṭiprī* dance in Agarkar, pp. 48 f., 80, and pl. 24, fig. 54, and the Kolattam mentioned by Balaratnam, 'Games and Pastimes of Kerala,' *Modern Review* (September 1942), p. 266. Under the name *laguḍa* or *lakuḍarāsa* this or a similar dance was evidently ancient and not necessarily confined to the Kṛishṇa cult. (3) A dance similar to the maypole dance, done indoors, in which each participant holds a ribbon, the end of which is fastened to a ring in the ceiling. The dancers as they circle about in two opposing

### 6. Concluding hymn or hymns

The performance of the *rās* ends much as it began, with the actors clustered formally about the throne giving darśan to the spectators. The vocalists of the troupe now offer songs of the same general type as the *maṅgalācaraṇ*. These songs often have as their theme the grace, power, and beauty of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, the praise of Vṛindāban, the saving powers of the dust of Braj (*brajraj*), or Kṛishṇa's special affection for the residents of Braj. The following song, a specimen of the kind offered at this time, was sung by a professional singer named Sant Rām, whose livelihood is to sing just such songs as this as guest vocalist for the *rāsdhārīs*. The occasion was a performance of the *Gocāraṇ Līlā* at Baṅsībaṭ :

परम धन राधा नाम आधार  
जाहि श्याम मुरली में टेरत सुमरत बारम्बार  
यन्त्र मन्त्र और वेद तन्त्र कौ सारन को सार  
श्री शुक प्रगट कीयो ना याते जान सार को सार  
सहचरी रूप धरौ नन्दनन्दन तऊ ना पायो पार  
व्यास दास अब प्रगट बखानत दार भार में भार ॥

The finest wealth is reliance on Rādhā's name,  
Whom Śyām calls with his flute, and thinks on o'er and o'er,  
The quintessence of charm, spell, Veda and Tantra.  
Śukadeva revealed it not, for he knew 'twas the essence of essences.<sup>31</sup>  
Taking the guise of a female companion, the Son of Nand did not  
reach the end of it even then.  
Vyāsdās now declares it openly, having stuffed his burden into the  
grain-parcher's stove.<sup>32</sup>

### 7. Pravacan (sometimes omitted)

Sometimes, as a final feature of the part of the performance which precedes the *līlā*, Kṛishṇa steps down from his throne at the conclusion of these songs and delivers a homily. The discourses are of three or four minutes' duration. They often describe the sanctity of Vṛindāban, exhort devotees to be faithful in pious practices, and affirm Kṛishṇa's promises to his devotees. We shall give here our notes on an address of this kind which was delivered in the course of a performance by the troupe of Svāmī Megh Śyām. We shall retain the direct discourse in order to retain the flavor of the original, even

lines interweave these ribbons, then untwine them again. The writer has not seen this dance personally.

<sup>31</sup> Śukadeva is the principal narrator of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Rādhā-worshipping sects often feel compelled, as here, to explain why the author of that purāṇa does not once mention Rādhā's name.

<sup>32</sup> Vyāsdās was an important disciple of Hit Harivaṅs, founder of the Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya (Growse, *Mathurā*, 3rd ed., p. 216). The final phrase in this line means, idiomatically, to discard something and have done with it.



though our reporting is not complete. Kṛishṇa raised the palm of his right hand, pressed thumb and index finger together, and spoke in the following vein :

As Supreme Lord I have incarnated myself in twenty-four different forms, but the Kṛishṇa incarnation is superior to all the rest. Those many other forms were not complete. My full form I showed only in the Kṛishṇa avatār.

Consider the Rāma incarnation. Rāma was a prince. Not everyone could have access to him. But I am no prince. I am only a cowherd boy. I dress in a simple blanket. I go to tend the cows along with the other boys of the village. I can sing with anyone, I can eat with anyone.

I roam on foot about the paths of Braj. I don't wish to ride on a chariot, nor do I travel on the back of Garuḍa. Wherever I go, I trudge across the sands with shoeless feet. There is nothing so sacred as the sands of Braj on which my naked feet have trod.

I travel through field and wood, taking milk from house to house according to what people need. I do not want to be master, I wish to be the servant of all.

I am the servant of my devotees at every hour of day or night. When my worshipers call upon my name I come, taking guises according to their needs. I eat whatever they offer me; I live on whatever they give me. I love them so much that if they offer me love or a handful of water or any flower, I accept it with all my heart. If my devotees wish to sell me, I will even allow myself to be sold at their hands. Though I have everybody in my power, the devotees have me in their power. Whenever anyone meditates on me, I think of him and show him favor. To all people I am justice, but to my devotees I am a servant. I excuse them all their faults.

The actor resumed his seat. The curtain was then raised across the dais, concealing those upon it. There were a few low whispers and a few agitations of the face of the cloth while adjustments were being made behind it. The curtain was then taken away, and the production moved into its second and very different phase, that of the *lilā*.

The *lilā* is a one-act operetta that may deal with any one of well over a hundred episodes belonging to the Kṛishṇa cycle. So we move at this point from an ever-repeated sacrament that is describable in its every movement, and even in its words, to a drama of greatly varied content that can be described only in generalizations and through examples. For an impression of the nature of these *lilās* the reader should peruse the section which follows in conjunction with the illustrative material contained in the next two chapters. Chapter Seven contains a register of plots that are actually performed on the *rāslilā* stage. Chapter Eight consists of the full text and translation of one of the most loved of the *lilās*. Constant reference to those chapters will help give meaning to the study of literary sources and dramatic technique which we shall now take up.

Any lingering notion that the *rāslilā* is a mere pantomime will be finally dispelled by the first look at the *Uddhav Lilā* in Chapter Eight. Only a small percentage of its lines are uttered by anyone other than actors carrying out their assigned roles. It is a dialogue play. It contains four kinds of material, of which three are kinds of dialogue—there is dialogue in spoken prose, in spoken verse and in sung verse. The fourth kind of material is verse, sometimes narrative and sometimes lyrical, that is injected into the current of the



play by the svāmī of the troupe in his capacity of stage director and chief choral commentator.

We find in this text of the *Uddhav Līlā* only three of these songs sung by the master of the troupe, which make up the fourth category. The proportion of such songs in this piece is relatively low in comparison with other līlās the author has seen. Notes on a performance of the *Uddhav Līlā* by the troupe of Lakshmaṇ Svāmī record the use of twenty of these director's songs. The function of some of these choral comments from the side of the stage is to inform the audience of essential parts of the story which have not been made fully known through the speech and action of the performers.<sup>33</sup> Another function is to stimulate the minds of the audience with descriptions which will help them create the wholly imaginary settings of the stage action. A third type, not well represented in our script, is supportive singing by the svāmī, in co-ordination with an actor, to intensify the emotion of a situation. At sentimental points in a plot, the svāmī often joins in an actor's song, or sings a subdued lyrical comment on his situation or utterance. In the *Mahārās* as performed by Dāmodar Svāmī, for instance, the gopīs' songs of grief as they wandered through the forest in search of their vanished loved one were effectively reinforced again and again by the sob of the sārāṅgī and the low voice of the musician singing a commentary full of sadness and sympathy. Our recorded text below has few of these because of the double responsibility of the recording svāmī. Obligated to utter the parts of all his actors personally, he could not at the same time accompany them with songs of this kind.

Units of verse and of prose occur in about equal numbers in the *Uddhav Līlā* and in most of the other līlās. Verse and prose are commonly conjoined in the same speech: The actor sings or recites a few lines of verse and immediately paraphrases it in prose. This is the technique of the Rāmlīlā. It is used here for the same reason: the audience's need of a prose paraphrase in order to understand. Some verses of our *Uddhav Līlā* are difficult enough to perplex professors of Hindī literature who have a written text before them. The rāsdhārīs' usual audience, both in Vṛindāban and far afield, includes many whose comprehension of Brajbhāshā is imperfect. The rāsdhārīs give their hearers a second chance, in simple prose, to understand verse utterances that are difficult because they are either complex, archaic, or in an unaccustomed dialect.

Although this mixture of verse and prose generally prevails, one finds also considerable sequences of independent prose dialogues. There are sections

<sup>33</sup> Narrative inserts in other Indian plays have puzzled several students of the Indian theater. See Caland, pp. 3 f.; M. Winternitz, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 142; Julius Eggeling, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, part VII (London, 1904), pp. 1604 f.

as well in which verses follow close upon one another and speaker follows speaker with little or no use of prose paraphrase. Evidently the composer or compiler of a līlā is bound by no recipe; he is free to resort to prose or spoken verse or sung verse according to his own sense of fitness. Study of our text reveals some of the considerations which govern his choice. Narrative portions which have no deep emotional significance are in prose. Prose is the sole medium also for farce (which is not represented in this intensely serious play). When emotions are involved, the composer tends to turn to poetry that is afterward explained in prose. Where sentiment runs high, the prose element gives way before an increasing proportion of verse. When emotion reaches its most exalted level, the verse is sung. Our text has a somewhat larger verse content than the average because it is more emotional than most. The author has seen an audience of three hundred in tears, almost without exception, at a performance of the *Uddhav Līlā*.

The rāslīlā has been called an unwritten drama. More accurately, it is an unpublished one. Though no books of any kind are seen in use about the stage, while visiting the house of a rāsdhārī, the author noticed an adult sitting in a circle of young actors, teaching them their lines from a yellowed handwritten copybook. Questions revealed that almost all svāmīs have well-guarded collections of līlās in manuscript form. The master of every troupe must have at his command at least thirty plays because he is often called upon to fill thirty-day engagements before a single group. Superior maṇḍalīs have a repertoire of about forty-five. Scripts are accumulated in various ways. Those masters whose fathers were in the profession before them have inherited a full collection. Written plays are sometimes bought or even received as gifts. Ambitious actors sometimes write down the entire texts of the plays in which they act and thus build up a library for their own future use. Līlās have also been cribbed from rivals by taking surreptitious notes at their performances.

The number of distinct līlās which are played by the troupes of Braj probably approaches 150. In the next chapter 106 plots are described on the basis of experienced persons' recollections of actual performances.

A thorough treatment of the literary sources of our līlās would require much work on their texts, which are not available. We offer here the information provided by the rāsdhārīs together with a few discoveries and reflections of our own.

The average svāmī is at most an editor of his scripts. He can cut a play, or lengthen it with additional songs. The basic texts are the work of certain exceptional rāsdhārīs or of persons very close to them and to the stage. Among the rāsdhārīs who are remembered as playwrights are Keśavdev Rāsdhārī, Rādhakṛ̥ṣṇa Rāsdhārī, and Brajlāl Bohre, all of whom, though now dead,

lived into the present century. Even such men are as much compilers as composers because they find the outlines and the verse element of their dramas in a vast Kṛishṇaite literature of narrative poetry. A visit to an old Hindi library will turn up volume upon volume either entitled *Kṛishṇalīlā* or named after one or another of the līlās given in Chapter Seven. On examining them, one finds that they are ballads or ballads mixed with lyrics; they are not plays. But this is the type of material that the līlā writer edits, adapts, intermingles with fragments from other sources which take his fancy, and supplies with prose paraphrases and supports with songs to create his scripts. In the text below of our *Uddhav Līlā* the verses of dozens of poets, known and unknown, are interwoven.

With regard to the origin of the hundred-odd plots in Chapter Seven, we can sometimes be specific about the sources of the stories but not about the sources of the texts. We have indicated in connection with each līlā the earliest literary source of the episode that has come to our attention. The general nature of the body of poetry on which the playwrights draw can be seen in a recent anthology of Brajbhāshā poetry compiled by Indra Brahmcārī, which is devoted exclusively to the poets who have created the ocean of extant verse on the childhood of Kṛishṇa. Indra Brahmcārī did not collect his *Śrīkṛishṇa-līlā-rahasya* from rāsdhārīs, but his four-volume collection provides a substantial and representative sampling of the literature on which their playwrights depend. The poets included in this compilation begin with many of the great literary figures of the sixteenth century: Sūrdās, Nanddās, Kṛishṇadās, Paramānanddās, Caturbhujdās (all members of the famous Aṣṭachāp), Ras Khān, Śrī Bhaṭṭ, Svāmi Haridās, and Hit Harivaṇs. The seventeenth-century poet Dhruvadās comes next, and the eighteenth century is represented by Cācā Vṛindābandās, Nāgarīdās, Bhagavat Rasik, and Albelī Ali. The nineteenth-century poets included are Sevakjī, Nārāyaṇ Svāmī, Lalita Kiśorī, and Lalita Mādhurī. But there are many poets, not represented in this anthology, whose verses are used in the plays. Our text of the *Uddhav Līlā* contains verses of the eighteenth-century poet Tosh and, as a matter of fact, some compositions of the performing rāsdhārī, Kuñvar Pāl himself. In Vṛindāban there lives today a sādhu named Premānand, who writes not only *pravacans*, the little addresses which Kṛishṇa gives at the close of the rās, but also the verse framework of entire new līlās, which he gives away to rāsdhārīs whom he favors.

The typical rāsdhārī protests strongly that the līlās which he himself produces are of great age and authority. A circular distributed in Calcutta by Svāmī Muralīdhar Bohre and Svāmī Cet Rām expresses this common claim:

These troupes are respected by the cultured people of Govardhan and Vṛindāban, and they do not do the imitative līlās on the basis of anything other than the tenth chapter of



the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the utterances of Sūrdās, Nanddās, the Eight Companions, and the feet of the teachers.

Svāmī Kishan Lāl told the author that all the līlās which respectable rāsdhārīs play are found in germ, at least, in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The author's own hasty search through the Bhāgavata in quest of the sources of the 106 līlās turned up the stories of only twenty-eight of them there. The principles by which the plays are derived from the Bhāgavata were made clearer by Svāmī Kishan Lāl when he went on to say that Vallabhācārya was a reincarnation of Rādhā, that Vallabha's eight poet-disciples (the Aṣṭachāp) were the reincarnations of Rādhā's eight female companions (the *sakhīs*), and that the vernacular writings of all of these persons are to be regarded as true renderings of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The *Sūrsāgar* of Sūrdās in particular conveys the content of the Bhāgavata, and the *Braj Vilās* of Brajbāsī Dās (written in A.D. 1743) is in turn a true version of the content and spirit of the *Sūrsāgar*. Thus this famous svāmī can claim the scriptural authority of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, if he wishes, for performances in which the oldest material used is poetry of the eighteenth century.

Other rāsdhārīs also use with good conscience poetry that is even later, and has a still more tenuous connection with the Bhāgavata. Good examples of their modern compositions may be seen in the eighteen plays summarized in Chapter Seven with the notation that their earliest source is the *Rās Chadma Vinod* of Cācā Vṛindābandās, a writer of the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> His radically innovating stories about Kṛishṇa's disguises are obviously new literary creations having no roots in the Bhāgavata or in any older literature. For these plays a new type of claim to revelational authority is plainly needed, and it has been provided. It is said that Kṛishṇa himself revealed these sports of his to Cācā Vṛindāban Dās in dreams. Indra Brahmccārī brings out into the open this theory of direct inspiration, and uses it to explain the sanctity of a wide range of poetry which common sense sees as original work. He says that he

became acquainted with many līlās not to be found in the Bhāgavata, the Garga Saṃhitā, the Brahmapurāṇa, etc. Sūrdās, Nanddās, Kumbhandās, Caturbhujdās, Ras Khān, Śrī Bhaṭṭ, Harivyāsdev, Haridās Svāmī, Hit Harivaṇs, Śrī Vyāsji, Dhruvadās, Vṛindāban Dās, Sevakji, Nāgaridās, Bhagavatraṣik, Nārāyaṇ Svāmī and other great men have written verses after having had direct revelatory vision of the līlās.<sup>35</sup>

In short, the literary source of today's līlās that is most talked of is the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, but their actual relation to the Bhāgavata is usually nominal or at least indirect. A significant measure of the material dependence of our

<sup>34</sup> Cācā Vṛindābandās, *Rās Chadma Vinod* (Vṛindāban, Kṛishṇarūpanikuṇjānurāgiṇī, 1935).

<sup>35</sup> Indra Brahmccārī, *Śrīkṛishṇalīlā-rahasya* (Vṛindāban, Svāmī Śrīnārāyaṇandās, 1937-38), 2, *Apnī Kahānī*, pp. 7 f.



lilās on the Bhāgavata is the prominence in them of Rādhā, of whom the Bhāgavata tells nothing whatsoever. The earliest textual materials used verbally in the plays are the elaborations of the puranic narratives in the Brajbhāshā poetry of the sixteenth century. In every subsequent century, including our own, the poets of Braj have been setting forth new mythology concerning Kṛishṇa, and the rāsdhārīs have been using their verses freely.

One would naturally like to know to what extent these Braj poets created their poetry with the needs of the Kṛishṇaite stage as their direct impetus. The introduction to the principal edition of the *Braj Vihār* of Nārāyaṇ Svāmī indicates that this nineteenth-century poet was an enthusiastic follower of the rāsmaṇḍalīs and wrote verse especially for their use.<sup>36</sup> Dhruvadās of the seventeenth century was inspired to compose, it is said, during vigils on the rāsmaṇḍal in Vṛindāban,<sup>37</sup> and Lālā Sītā Rām says of him, 'He was very fond of Rāslilā and a great friend of Rāsdhārīs of Karhālī.'<sup>38</sup> Evidently poets sometimes wrote for the stage, but we cannot generalize widely on this point because our evidence is modern and secondary.

In estimating the influence of the rāslilā, we must not use the familiar quantitative measures alone. It is legitimate to take into consideration the number of troupes, their pattern of travel, and the number of people reached by them annually. But this approach misses the dimension of the rāslilā that gives it its great significance. What makes the rāslilā remarkable is the treasure of literature on which it draws, the refinement of language and feeling which it derives from generations of literate stage people, and its consequent power to attract and influence relatively sophisticated and cultured audiences.

As we have seen, the rāslilā makes direct use of the creations of the greatest Hindī poets. The men who adapt their works to the stage are of the most learned caste; they have dwelt in this poetry for generations and have had full opportunity to develop discriminating standards of taste. An examination of the plots which we have summarized will reveal that the plays have been composed by persons of disciplined literary skill. The worst failings of folk plays are avoided. The playwrights do not have the lazy habit of agglomerating episodes into a rambling plot. Nor is the stage action a mere emotional effusion upon some stereotyped situation. Each lilā works out fully the potentialities of one simple episode. The action is evolved with such deftness that interest is generated by the plot itself. The plays demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the ways of children and adolescents. In the delineation of Kṛishṇa, at least, there is subtlety in the drawing of character.

<sup>36</sup> Nārāyaṇ Svāmī, *Braj Vihār* (Bombay, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, 1938), pp. 1 f.

<sup>37</sup> Paṇḍit Priyādās Śukla, ed., *Rādhāvallabha Bhaktamāla* (Vṛindāban, Brajvallabhdās Mukhiyā, 1929), pp. 329 f.

<sup>38</sup> Sītā Rām, 2 (1921), 358.

In staging, the rāslīlā benefits from the fact that its actors and musicians are full-time professionals and that its directors come from the social class which has been the arbiter of decorum and taste. The difficulties inherent in the use of child actors are overcome to a surprising degree by the skill used in selecting, managing, and training them. The young performers, like those of the Rāmlīlā, show excellent clarity, projection, vivacity, and naturalness in their speech. Stage movements are rehearsed until smoothness and spontaneity are achieved. The music of the rāslīlā is subdued, and the voices of the singers are without harshness or strain. The farcical element in the drama usually rests upon whimsy and the exposition of juvenile character rather than upon cheap slapstick devices. The amorous element in the plots is never allowed to express itself on the stage in a vulgar form. The rāslīlā still merits all the praise which was given by its first Western viewers. This writer's experience does not support Balwant Gargi's judgment that the rāslīlā is poor theater. Among the dramas discussed in this book, it should receive highest laurels for dramatic and literary excellence.

Several stories about the power of the rāslīlā to win converts to the worship of Kṛishṇa are told and retold in Vaishṇava hagiologic literature. There is the story of Alībhagavān, converted to Kṛishṇaism in the theater, and of Mīr Mādhava, once a wealthy Muslim, who went with a devotee to see a performance in Mathurā and was so affected by it that he settled in Vṛindāban and became a devotee and a writer of poems in Kṛishṇa's praise. A companion story is the tale of Candā the bandit, who swooped down upon a rāsmaṇḍal to rob the actors of their jewels but stayed to become a devotee.<sup>39</sup> Indra Brahmācārī himself tells of how he was once compelled by an insistent devotee to go along to see a rāslīlā, most unwillingly. The sweet sound of the sārāṅgi and the splendid sight of the deity of the play worked its magic with him, and he came away resolved to spend the rest of his life in the holy precincts of Vṛindāban.<sup>40</sup> The rāslīlā can charm and move people of good vernacular education.

Several hundred thousand spectators see performances of the rāslīlā each year in Braj. Those who flock to see the rāsmaṇḍalīs in the course of their long tours must be much greater in number. Whether at home or abroad, the power of the rāsdhārīs to draw large audiences cannot be separated from the power of the cult of the child Kṛishṇa. When the troupes are playing in Mathurā District, it is the pilgrim horde which fills their theaters. During their months of wandering, it is the Kṛishṇa devotees who rally around them,

<sup>39</sup> Munshi Hari Bhaksh, *Śrībhaktimāla arthāt Hari-bhaktiprakāśikā*, pp. 242-46; Hariprapanna Rāmānujadāsa, *Bhaktamālāharibhaktiprakāśikā* (Kalyān and Bombay, Gaṅgāviśṇu Śrīkṛishṇadāsa, 1899), pp. 327-32.

<sup>40</sup> Brahmācārī, 2, 4-6.

moved by an old reverence for hallowed Braj and for the brahman players who are Kṛishṇa's fellow countrymen.

After a summer vacation in their scattered homes, the actors begin their new year by joining their bands again at Vṛindāban at the start of the rainy season. Pilgrims pour into Braj throughout the monsoon months, and from the third day of the light half of Śrāvaṇ until Kṛishṇa's birthday on the eighth of the dark half of Bhādoṇ, the acting of rāslīlās goes on there morning, noon, and night. Wealthy pilgrims summon troupes to give performances at their dharmśālās. Families who have rented houses for the sacred season invite troupes to their quarters, summon their friends, and welcome all devotees who may appear. The *mahānt*s of temples are tireless promoters of the rāslīlā and many of them are able to offer performances at their temples occasionally by steady importuning of pilgrims for funds. Some temples have endowments or stable recurrent grants for the specific purpose of supporting rāslīlā performances for pilgrims. Programs averaging a fortnight in length are offered in Vṛindāban at the height of the rainy season by the temples called Kānpurvālā, Tikārī, Dīnājpur, Rasik Bihārī, Savaman Śālagrām, Śrījī, Lālā Bābū, and Raṅgījī. Patronage by the temples continues irregularly throughout the year. The Calcutta Temple presents a month-long series in November. At Uriyā Bābā's Āśram the rāslīlā alternates with other presentations. The loss of grants from once-prosperous Hindu princes has recently shortened the list of institutions able to patronize the dramatic arts in this way.

The most extensive program of rāslīlā known in Braj is a series which is staged as part of the observances of the *banjātrā*, which is a many-day tour through the countryside on a meandering trail about 120 miles in length. It includes visits to almost every wood and grove, every pond and cave that legend associates with the combats, antics, and loves of the boy Kṛishṇa. One touring party covers this trail in only fifteen days, starting on the eleventh of the dark half of Bhādoṇ, celebrating the legends of each place only with kathā. But the tour which gives the rāslīlā one of its major opportunities is that conducted annually by one of the gosāīṇs of the Vallabha Sampradāya. Responsibility for leading it is shifted from year to year among the gosāīṇs residing in Ahmadābād, Bombay, Nāthdvārā, Koṭā, and Gokul. The managing gosāīṇ of a given year makes up a calendar of his proposed tour, and he publicizes it well in advance so that all who wish may join his party. A calendar seen by the author outlined a journey of fifty-two days with stops of one to nine days in each of thirty-five places. The gosāīṇ in charge must raise the considerable sum needed not only to feed the hundreds of poor people who join his party but also to meet the cost of rāslīlā performances at all the major sites. Each evening while on the trail, the multitude of pilgrims gathers to see repeated, by svarūps who are for the time being the deities themselves, the



very deeds which were done on the soil on which they sit. A single rāsmaṇḍali accompanies the pilgrim band for this purpose. The same troupe is likely to be engaged year after year, since the assignment involves the mastering of a number of rare lilās for which there is little demand on other occasions.<sup>41</sup> The performances of the banjātrā are otherwise noteworthy only for the fact that they are performed in most places on the rāslilā's own special style of stage, the rāsmaṇḍal.

In September almost all the troupes scatter from Braj. A few return in November, and a few come back regularly in the Holi season when there are many pilgrims in the area. All return in May to disperse for the annual vacation. Some troupes set out from Vṛindāban for distant cities in response to written invitations from seṭhs, mahants, or gosāiṇs. Sometimes the invitation is from an association of Vaiṣṇava merchants who have been raising money by a voluntary tax on their incomes. Having accumulated the necessary amount, they invite a rāsdhārī to give performances in a series that usually lasts a month and covers the story of Kṛishṇa from his birth to the killing of Kaṇs. When a troupe arrives in a town without an invitation, it offers a performance of its own accord at the local temple of Kṛishṇa. If the impression is favorable, requests for its services follow, and one invitation leads to another. Svāmīs sometimes distribute printed notices announcing their arrival. Any aggressive promotion, such as inserting advertisements in newspapers or calling on prospective patrons, is considered undignified, but a few use these methods also. The troupes seldom travel on a predetermined circuit. They go where their invitations lead them, accepting what bids they like.

<sup>41</sup> The itinerary of the banjātrā is described in Growse, *Mathurā* (3rd ed.), pp. 79–81, and in a host of small Hindī guidebooks, always on sale in Mathurā, which give the legends associated with each spot. An actor who had himself performed in the plays on this trail for four or five years provided the list, given below, of the lilās which are enacted at the major stopping places. When the pilgrims stop overnight at places which are not mentioned, the svāmī may stage whatever lilā he wishes.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Madhuban: <i>Brājyātrā Līlā</i>             | 17. Mānpurā: <i>Mān Līlā</i>              |
| 2. Satoyā: <i>Śāntanu Līlā</i>                 | 18. Barsānā: <i>Gurīyā Līlā</i>           |
| 3. Bahulāban: <i>Bahulā Līlā</i>               | 19. Saṅket: <i>Vivāha Līlā</i>            |
| 4. Aṛiṅg: <i>Dān Līlā</i>                      | 20. Nandgāñv: <i>Śaṅkar Līlā</i>          |
| 5. Kusum Sarovar: <i>Sāñjhī Līlā</i>           | 21. Pāv Sarovar: <i>Śyāmsagāī Līlā</i>    |
| 6. Candra Sarovar: <i>Rāsapañcādhyāyī Līlā</i> | 22. Kokilāban: <i>Panghaṭādi Līlā</i>     |
| 7. Jatīpurā: <i>Govardhan Līlā</i>             | 23. Śeṣhāyī: <i>Kshīrsāgar Līlā</i>       |
| 8. Dīg: <i>Vaidya Līlā</i>                     | 24. Paygāñv: <i>Pūtānābadh Līlā</i>       |
| 9. Paramdarā: <i>Sudāmā Līlā</i>               | 25. Śergaṭh: <i>Dhenukāsurbadh Līlā</i>   |
| 10. Ādībadrī: <i>Tīrth Darśan Līlā</i>         | 26. Cīrghāṭ: <i>Cīrharan Līlā</i>         |
| 11. Lukluk Guphā: <i>Añkh Miñcaunī Līlā</i>    | 27. Nandghāṭ: <i>Varuṇa Līlā</i>          |
| 12. Vyomāsūr Guphā: <i>Vyomāsurbadh Līlā</i>   | 28. Vṛindāban: <i>Kālīnāg Līlā</i>        |
| 13. Bhojan Thālī: <i>Chāk Līlā</i>             | 29. Lohāban: <i>Lohāsurbadh Līlā</i>      |
| 14. Kāmban: <i>Kāmdēv Madmardan Līlā</i>       | 30. Brahmāṇḍghāṭ: <i>Māñṭikhāman Līlā</i> |
| 15. Kādam Khaṇḍī: <i>Gocāran Līlā</i>          | 31. Gokul: <i>Janma Līlā</i>              |
| 16. Ūñcāgāñv: <i>Caṇḍrāvalī Līlā</i>           | 32. Mathurā: <i>Kaṇsbadh Līlā</i>         |



Rāsdhārīs belonging to the Vallabhā Sampradāya often head for Gujarat and Bombay, where they can expect a welcome from the many adherents of the sect who belong to the merchant classes of those areas.<sup>42</sup> Rām Datt's troupe, for instance, left Vṛindāban in September 1949 and went direct to Bombay, where the players spent two and a half months among the Vaiṣṇavas of the suburbs of Dādar, Vile Pārle, Andherī, Jogeśvarī, and Malāḍ; then they went to Nāsik, returning to Vṛindāban for the Kuṃbh Melā at the beginning of February. Another troupe spent the same period in Bombay and Ahmādābād. Svāmī Muralīdhar Bohre went from Vṛindāban to Jhāṇsī, Citrakūṭ, Satnā, and Kaṭnī, then to Bilāspur and Raigarh in Madhya Pradesh and to Jhārsugudā in Orīssa, returning to Rājnāndgāṇv in Madhya Pradesh, and then to Vṛindāban for the Kuṃbh Melā. His previous tour had taken him to Janakpur in Bihar, and he has spent many seasons in Calcutta where patrons are plentiful among the Marwari merchants as well as among the members of the sect of Caitanya. Occasionally, troupes do go to Madras or even to Rangoon in Burma. The one area where they have not gone within the memory of the profession is Nepal, whose government excludes them.

Although the majority of troupes at any given time are no doubt at work in the Hindī-speaking areas, the most striking characteristic of the touring rāsmaṇḍalīs is their ability to cross linguistic boundaries and win their way regularly in areas where the normal speech is Gujarati, Marathi, Uriya, Maithili, or Bengali. Whether there is a relation between the activities of these troupes and the rise of Hindī to a national importance cannot be determined until the history of the rāslīlā is better known. But at the present time the penetrations of these revered actors into non-Hindī-speaking areas swell the prestige and increase the use of a form of Hindī. The rāslīlā performance can hold the attention of those of small competence in the Braj dialect, and for those who do not know the language well, it carries its own means of instruction. The contagious emotion of the rāslīlā creates everywhere new devotees of Kṛishṇa, new singers of Brajbhāshā songs, new pilgrims to Braj, and new readers of Brajbhāshā literature.

No one in Braj knows how long the touring of the rāsmaṇḍalīs has been going on. It began before the building of the railroads, for Broughton and Tod came in contact with troupes on tour at the beginning of the last century. Our evidence on an earlier history will emerge in connection with a discussion of the origin of the plays themselves.

<sup>42</sup> Krishnalal Mohanlal Jhaveri, *Further Milestones in Gujarati Literature*, p. 181; cf. Ridgeway, p. 200. Other informants of Ridgeway (pp. 203, 205) reported rāsmaṇḍalīs in Nāgpur and in Hyderabad, Sindh.





7

## THE REPERTOIRE OF THE RĀSDHĀRĪS

The summaries given below include the plots of all the most popular *līlās* and of many that are performed only rarely. Several dozen additional *līlās* were omitted because of lack of sure information about them or because of doubt that they have actually been played.

About twenty of these plays have been sketched by the author on the basis of actual attendance at performances. An equal number are described from similar direct report of friends. The remainder of the summaries have been compiled with the help of three professional actors of Vṛindāban. Since the plots come from the stage and not from books, they will not always agree with literary versions of the same theme or even with the performances of troupes other than the ones from which this information was obtained.

For those who may wish to see a fuller form of any of these narratives, a published source of the essential plot will be indicated whenever possible. Without a complete text of each play, no one can guarantee, of course, that the drama as played was actually based upon the literary source given. We shall cite the oldest literary source known to us, but we shall not generally push this quest back beyond the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* if the tale is found in that ancient work. The most common literary references will be indicated by the following short titles:

*BP*—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Madras, Sastrulu & Sons, 1937).

*BV*—Brajbāsī Dās, *Braj Vilās* (Bombay, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, saṃvat 1994 [A.D. 1937]).

*Crooke*—William Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (4 vols. Calcutta, Superintendent of Government Printing, 1896).

*KLR*—Indra Brahmecārī, *Kṛishṇalīlā Rahasya* (4 vols. Vṛindāban, Śrīnārāyaṇ-dās, saṃvat 1995 [A.D. 1938]).

*RCV*—Vṛindābandās, *Rās Chadma Vinod* (Mathurā, Kṛishṇarūpanikuñjanu-rāgiṇī, saṃvat 1992 [A.D. 1935]).

*Sūrsāgar*—Sūrdās, *Sūrsāgar*, ed. Nandadulāre Vājpeyī (2d ed., 2 vols. Banāras, Nāgarīpracāriṇī Sabhā, saṃvat 2009 [A.D. 1952]).

How the rāsdhārīs use these literary materials has been explained in the preceding chapter (pp. 154 ff.).

The list of plots which follows provides a survey of the current stock-in-trade of the rāsdhārīs in all its variety. It is of interest as material for the study of the development of mythology because it reveals the condition of a living and growing tradition of Kṛishṇa myth in the middle of the twentieth century.

The rāsdhārīs themselves do not classify these dramas in any explicit and widely accepted manner. They are not familiar with the ancient science of dramaturgy and its theory of dominant *rasas*. However, the ancient Indian way of cultivating traditional types of feeling lives on in their work, even in the absence of the ancient self-consciousness about the matter. In practice the rāsdhārīs show a strong tendency to dwell upon a single emotion in each of their līlās. This unity of feeling springs in part from the conciseness of the plots. Each plot deals with a single very limited incident which has a distinctive emotional flavor due to the particular light in which Kṛishṇa is seen in that episode. Playwrights and actors sense what this prevailing tone is, focus their effort upon it, intensify its special flavor by use of their musical and literary resources, and draw forth from their audiences the play's distinctive type of emotional response. The recognizing of these dominant emotions is the natural method for classifying the plays. In naming the categories, we can do no better than to bring back into use some of the terminology of traditional Indian dramaturgy.

The first class of līlās is made up of those which are dominated by the *vīrarasa* or heroic mood. Hindī usage sometimes refers to them as the *aiśvarya līlās*—those celebrating Kṛishṇa's lordship. Most of the plays in this category draw their plots from old puranic sources and tell of Kṛishṇa's heroic exercise of his power against evil beings. The asuras and other monsters who appear on the stage in these līlās were no doubt once dreaded, and on-lookers must have felt awe at Kṛishṇa's power in disposing of them. Even today, in superior performances of the *Kāliyadaman Līlā* by the more emotional troupes, the fearsomeness of the serpent is felt, and there is a gasp of admiration and relief from the crowd when Kṛishṇa is finally revealed triumphant, standing on the head of the conquered *nāg*. But generally the sternness of these old līlās has fled. Little boys in today's audiences greet with loud laughter the lop-eared asuras who caper on to the stage, and the child Kṛishṇa pushes them over as if they were straw. Even in theological interpretation these līlās have become mild. They are often called *anugrahalīlās*—sports in which



Kṛishṇa manifested his *grace* by slaying the demons with his own hand, thus guaranteeing them immediate salvation. Among the līlās that inspire or were originally intended to inspire awe of Kṛishṇa's heroic power are numbers 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 21, 36, 39, 41, 42, 52, 53, 55, 60, 66, 67, 70, 71, 73, 81, 88, 89, 93, 94, 102, and 104. Although these līlās are numerous and although a few like the *Kāliyadaman Līlā* are great favorites, on the whole they are not often played.

The largest class of līlās is the group dominated by *mādhuryarasa*, or the romantic sentiment. Here attention is focused upon Kṛishṇa as the heart-captivating lover. Sometimes the theme is his irresistible romantic appeal to the gopīs. More often the subject is an episode in the flirtation of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. Dramas on the loves of this pair are called *nikuñj līlās* because their common trysting place was in the bowers (*nikuñj*). Through the extensive use of the writings of the prolific eighteenth-century poet Cācā Vṛindābandās many līlās of this class have come to deal with untiring attempts by Kṛishṇa to meet Rādhā by adopting some amusing disguise. The līlās in which romantic love is the principal interest are numbers 2, 18, 22, 26, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 43, 45, 48–51, 54, 56–59, 62, 63, 65, 68, 72, 75, 77, 79, 82–85, 90, 92, 97, 99–101, 103, and 105.

Delight in Kṛishṇa's mischievous boyishness is a subordinate feature in almost all the līlās. In a handful it sets the dominant mood. In this class are numbers 5, 15, 16, 17, 38, 61, 69, 78, 80, 86, and 106. The prevailing emotional tone of these līlās might be called the *vātsalyarasa*, the mood of parental fondness toward a child. The term is a familiar one in the literature of the bhakti cults. This emotion occurs often as a subordinate mood, and is more prominent in the entire body of plays than this short list indicates.

The rest of the līlās in our collection cannot be forced into any of these three classes.

To locate particular titles in this list, those who are unfamiliar with the order of the devanāgarī alphabet may use the English index at the end of the book.

### 1. *Aghāsurbadh Līlā*

Kṛishṇa kills a snake-demon sent against him by King Kaṇṣ. (BP X.13).

### 2. *Antardhān Līlā*

During the dancing of the Mahārās, the gopīs become proud because of the attentions shown them by Kṛishṇa. Kṛishṇa therefore disappears and shows himself again only after they have been humbled and purified by the sorrow of separation. (BP X.30–32. This episode is often played as an incident in the *Mahārās Līlā*.)

3. *Annaprāśan Līlā*

This līlā enacts the ceremony at the house of Nand on the occasion of giving the infant Kṛishṇa his first solid food. There is little plot but much singing and instrumental music. (*BP*, 43 ff.)

4. *Arishṭāsurbadh Līlā*

Kaṇs sends a demon in the form of a bull to kill Kṛishṇa. Kṛishṇa slays it with a horn wrenched from its own head. (*BP* X.6.)

5. *Āñkh Miñcaunī Līlā*

Because the child Kṛishṇa wears ankle bells, his brother Balrām catches him easily in a game of blind-man's-buff. Kṛishṇa pouts and says he will not let Balrām have even a taste of the milk of his new cow. He relents at last, saying that Balrām may have a very little bit. [Nārāyaṇ Svāmī, *Braj Vihār* (Bombay, Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, saṃvat 1995 [A.D. 1938], p. 27.)]

6. *Ukhalbandhan Līlā*

Kṛishṇa smashes the butter jar. Yaśodā punishes him by tying him to a wooden mortar. He drags the heavy mortar and with it knocks down two trees, thereby releasing two souls who had been imprisoned in that form. (*BP* X.9.)

7. *Uddhav Līlā*

To humble the pride of Uddhav, a proud Advaita philosopher, Kṛishṇa sends him to Braj to convert the gopīs to his outlook. They worst him in debate and send him back a convinced follower of the way of bhakti. (*BP* X.46 ff., with significant differences.)

8. *Kaṇsbadh Līlā*

King Kaṇs invites Kṛishṇa and Balrām to wrestle in his arena and pits them against murderous opponents. Kṛishṇa kills his adversary, then drags Kaṇs down to his death. Vasudev and Devakī are released from prison, and Ugrasen is restored to the throne. (*BP* X.44. *BP* verses are the ones actually used by most rāsdhārīs.)

9. *Kāmdev Madmardan Līlā*

Kāmdev boastfully declares that he has conquered both gods and men, but still is spoiling for a fight. He challenges Mahādev to a battle. Mahādev says that he is too old but that Kṛishṇa of Vṛindāban will give him all the war he wants. While Kṛishṇa is dancing with the gopīs, Kāmdev attacks him with his flower-tipped arrows. Kṛishṇa turns Kāmdev's weapons aside and leaves him stretched out flat upon the rāsmaṇḍal.

10. *Kāliyadaman Līlā* (or *Kālīnāg Līlā*)

With a view to destroying Kṛishṇa, Kaṇs orders Nand's family to deliver to him blue lotuses taken from the pool of the dread serpent Kāliya. Kṛishṇa subdues this serpent and sends it away. (*BP* X.15, 16.)

11. *Kubjā Kṛitārth Līlā*

While entering Mathurā for the final conflict with Kaṇṣ, Kṛishṇa meets Kubjā, the hump-backed maid who supplies Kaṇṣ with sandalwood paste. She transfers to Kṛishṇa at once her loyalty, her unguent and her love. Kṛishṇa puts a hand under her chin and miraculously straightens her back. (BP X.42.)

12. *Keśīdānavbadh Līlā*

Kṛishṇa slays a demon having the shape of a horse. (BP X.37.)

13. *Kshīrsāgar Līlā*

The gopīs and cowherds ask Kṛishṇa to show them his divine form. Kṛishṇa asks Balrām, an incarnation of Śeshnāg, to revert to the form of that primeval serpent. Rādhā reverts to the form of Lakshmī. Then Kṛishṇa gives the astonished gopīs a vision of himself as Nārāyaṇa reclining upon Śeshnāg, with Lakshmī at his side, on the great Sea of Milk.

14. *Gandhin Līlā*

Kṛishṇa gains fraudulent admission to Rādhā's home in the guise of a vendor of perfumes. He is detected by Rādhā's friends, the sakhīs. (RCV, 85.)

15. *Guṛiyā Līlā*

The child Rādhā quarrels with her brother Śrīdāmā over his theft of her doll.

16. *Guṇijan Līlā*

The gopīs come to Rādhā and Kṛishṇa in the disguise of *naṭs* (tumblers) and please them with their feats. Rādhā promises them any reward they like. They reply that they will have, please, her beloved, Kṛishṇa. Rādhā sits in tears until the players doff their guise.

17. *Gocāraṇ Līlā*

The small boy Kṛishṇa insists that he is big enough now to go out in the morning with the herds. The family priest permits his going after he has obtained for his protection a charmed blanket on which Rādhā had once sat. In the pastures at last, Kṛishṇa is taught dancing by the herd-boy Tosh. All the boys eat together their lunch of bread, lentils, and buttermilk.

18. *Gopdevī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa in disguise comes to Rādhā, saying he is a woman of Nandgāṇv. Rādhā inquires about Kṛishṇa. The stranger exclaims, 'That scoundrel!' and finds herself in trouble.

19. *Gomay Śṛiṅgār Līlā*

Kṛishṇa finds a gopī who is gathering cowdung on the banks of the Jamunā and helps her carry her load. As reward she decorates his face with dots of cowdung and promises him as many lumps of butter as there are dots.

20. *Goregvāl Līlā*

In talking with Rādhā, Kṛishṇa compares her face to the moon, and she takes offense. In revenge she disguises herself as Kṛishṇa and comes before the gopīs declaring herself to be Kṛishṇa, and Kṛishṇa to be an impostor. There is quarrel and confusion until Rādhā ends the game, and Kṛishṇa grants a performance of the rās dance.

21. *Govardhan Līlā*

Kṛishṇa induces the people of Braj to change from the worship of Indra to the worship of Mount Govardhan. Indra retaliates by pouring down floods of rain. Kṛishṇa lifts the mountain and shelters the Braj people beneath it. Defeated and humbled, Indra makes an apology. (*BP* X.25.)

22. *Gaunevārī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa receives hospitality in Rādhā's home in the guise of a bride traveling to her husband's house. Discussing Kṛishṇa in the course of conversation, the newcomer makes unfavorable remarks about his character. When Rādhā hotly defends and praises Kṛishṇa, Kṛishṇa himself, beneath the disguise, is so deeply moved that he falls unconscious, and is found out. (*RCV*, 1.)

23. *Candā Līlā*

Baby Kṛishṇa demands the moon to play with, saying he will not eat or drink until it is given. Yaśodā fills his plate with water, and on its surface shows him the gleaming moon. [*Sūrsāgar*, I 325–32; *Periyālvār* in J. S. M. Hooper, *Hymns of the Alvars* (London, Oxford University Press, 1929), No. 37.]

24. *Caṇdrāvalī Līlā*

When Caṇdrāvalī Sakhī comes by while taking curds to market, Kṛishṇa demands a tax in merchandise. She sends him to make a leaf-cup for his curds, but she runs away while he is gone. In revenge he makes a fool of her by coming to her house in the disguise of a long-separated cousin.

25. *Chāk Līlā*

The cowherd boys eat up their lunches but are still hungry. Kṛishṇa sends them to beg from some brahmans who are conducting a sacrifice. The priests brush the boys aside, but their kindlier wives send excellent food in golden dishes and receive Kṛishṇa's blessing. (*BP* X.23.)

26. *Citerin Līlā*

Kṛishṇa comes to Rādhā's house disguised as a woman who paints pictures on cloth (*citerin*). Given a cloth to decorate, the visitor paints on it a beautiful picture of Rādhā holding hands with Kṛishṇa. Rādhā divines who the painter might be. [*RCV*, 6. On *citerin*, see R. V. Russell and Hira Lal, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces* (4 vols., London, Macmillan & Co., 1916, 2, 432 ff.)]



27. *Cīrharāṇ Līlā*

The gopīs pray to Śiv and Pārvatī for Kṛishṇa as a husband and bathe in the Jamunā, leaving their clothes on the bank. Kṛishṇa steals their clothes, climbs a tree, and compels them to come out of the water and salute him with both hands before returning the clothing. He promises to meet the gopīs in the rās dance in the autumn season. [BP X.22. Usual interpretation by Hariharananda Sarasvatī, 'Stolen Clothes', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 10 (1942), 102 ff.]

28. *Causar Līlā*

Rādhā and Kṛishṇa play chess; the stakes: slavery of the loser to the winner. Kṛishṇa loses, and binds himself over to Rādhā as her slave. (KLR, 3, 453.)

29. *Janma Līlā*

Kṛishṇa is born in King Kaṇṣ' prison. His father Vasudev is miraculously enabled to take the child from the cell to the house of the herdsman Nand, where Kṛishṇa is exchanged for a new-born girl. (BP X.3.)

30. *Jogin Līlā* (A)

Kṛishṇa sits on the riverbank in the guise of a yogī, and the village people press around him and bring him gifts. Rādhā arrives amid the crowd. The 'yogī' touches her feet with all his sacred articles, and with such fervor that he gives himself away. (RCV, 103.)

31. *Jogin Līlā* (B)

Kṛishṇa comes to Rādhā's town as a yogī. Rādhā remarks on his resemblance to her Śyāmsundar, though he mutters 'alakh, alakh!' instead of 'Rādhā, Rādhā'. The 'yogi' tries the name Rādhā experimentally. He is overcome by its potency, swoons, and is found out. (See *Alakṣnāmīs*, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.)

32. *Jogin Līlā* (C)

Kṛishṇa as a yogī comes to Rādhā and remarks that although he and Kṛishṇa were born at the same time, he himself is an ascetic of perfect knowledge and discipline, whereas Kṛishṇa is a thief and a libertine. Rādhā explodes in anger, and Kṛishṇa is so deeply moved that he falls unconscious.

33. *Joginī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa comes to Rādhā disguised as a female ascetic, gives her a lecture on the Absolute, and denounces the worldliness of Kṛishṇa. Rādhā retorts so sharply in Kṛishṇa's defense that Kṛishṇa, overjoyed, betrays himself.

34. *Ḍhāṇḍhin Līlā*

In the disguise of a minstrel woman (*ḍhāṇḍhin*), Kṛishṇa sings and wins Rādhā's acclaim and a reward consisting of some of Rādhā's own clothing.

Rādhā's companions insist on helping the 'woman' don the clothes, and Kṛishṇa is found out. (See *Dhārhi* in M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, Calcutta, 1872, 1, 275.)

35. *Tamolin Līlā*

A female vendor of betel so pleases Rādhā with her wares that Rādhā orders her companions to put on her one of her own royal sārīs. Under the vendor's garments Kṛishṇa is discovered. (See *Tamboli* in Crooke, 4, 355 ff.)

36. *Tīrth Darśan Līlā*

Nand and Yaśodā say they are going on pilgrimage to Prayāg, Kāśī, and other great *tīrths* and ask Kṛishṇa to do the chores of the homestead while they are gone. Kṛishṇa, reluctant, asks them to stay. By his yogic powers he brings the places of pilgrimage to them.

37. *Dadhikāndo Līlā*

When Nand sees the new-born Kṛishṇa in the arms of his wife, he celebrates the birth of a son. Milk and curds are thrown about, and the cowherds carry on clownish antics in the slime. Naṭs, *bhāṇḍs*, and other entertainers show their skills, offer congratulations and receive rewards. (*KLR*, 2, 207.)

38. *Dān Līlā*

The gopīs bring curds to sell in the town of Nandgāṇv. Kṛishṇa and his friends set up a 'toll-post' and demand tax in kind. A wrangle follows, and the gopīs complain to Yaśodā. Kṛishṇa counters all their accusations and gets his curds. (This *līlā*, in one of many variations, is always played on the final day of a month-long series of performances. It is then that the svāmī takes his 'tax' of those who have been enjoying his *līlās*. (*Sūrsāgar*, 1, 764–860; *BV*, 242 ff.)

39. *Dāvānal Samrakshaṇ Līlā*

When the demon Dāvānal sets the forest ablaze, terrifying the cows and cowherds, Kṛishṇa miraculously drinks up the fire. (*Sūrsāgar*, 1, 470–75.)

40. *Durbāsā Līlā*

The gopīs, wishing to cross the flooded Jamunā to worship Kṛishṇa's guru Durbāsā, gain passage by declaring, 'If Kṛishṇa is a bachelor, pure in thought, word and deed, then allow us to cross!' The gopīs offer Durbāsā large gifts of food, which he eats greedily. The gopīs ask the sage how they may cross the river again. 'Declare that Durbāsā is fasting,' says he. The river gives passage. [Gopāla-tāpinī Upanishad in T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, trans., *The Vaiṣṇavopaniṣads* (Adyar, 1945), pp. 61 ff.; E. W. Burlingame, 'The Act of Truth (saccakiriya): A Hindu Spell . . .', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1917), pp. 442–44.]

41. *Dhenukāsur Uddhār Līlā*

Balrām kills Dhenukā, one of Kaṇṣ' demon-emissaries who, mingling in the herds in the form of a cow, had been destroying the cows and the calves. (BP X.15.)

42. *Dhobimāraṇ Līlā*

Kṛishṇa, entering Mathurā, meets the royal laundryman and demands that he deliver over to him the royal clothes of King Kaṇṣ. The laundryman refuses to do so. Kṛishṇa kills him. (BP X.41.)

43. *Naṭvin Līlā*

Kṛishṇa disguised as a female acrobat amuses Rādhā at Saṅket by doing the peacock dance on the branches of a banyan tree. The sharp eyes of the gopīs penetrate his disguise. (RCV, 72.)

44. *Naṇdotsav Līlā*

The arrival of the infant Kṛishṇa at Nand's house is celebrated. The herdsmen come and give congratulations. Entertainers called *dhāṇḍh* and *dhāṇḍhin* sing and dance, buffoons (*bhāṇḍ* and *naqqāl*) put on humorous imitations and go away with rewards. (Cf. No. 34 above.)

45. *Nāin Līlā*

Appearing at Rādhā's house in the disguise of a barber woman, Kṛishṇa receives a commission to care for Rādhā's hair. But the moment the 'barber' touches her hair, he is engulfed in emotion, falls in a faint, and is discovered. (RCV, 51.)

46. *Nāmkaṛaṇ Līlā*

Gargjī the family priest comes to the house of Nand, calculates horoscopes, and gives names to Kṛishṇa and Balrām, explaining their meanings. (BV, 47.)

47. *Nārad Līlā*

Nārad brings to the new-born Kṛishṇa, with his devotion, the gift of a charm made of a lion's claw. (RCV, 131.)

48. *Nikuñj Hindol Līlā* (or *Jhūlan Līlā*)

Rādhā and Kṛishṇa swing in the grove. They push each other, then sit side by side and swing together. (Lacking plot, this is merely a sentimental spectacle. KLR, 3, 61.)

49. *Naukā Līlā* (or *Ḍauṅgā Līlā*)

After a day in the market the tired gopīs wish to go home across the broad river. Kṛishṇa appears as boatman, but tells them their baggage is too heavy for his small boat. He lightens them of all their curds, which he eats, and throws all their pots and jewelry into the river. Then he takes them all to the other side. [P. Sambamoorthy, 'A History of Indian Opera', *Dr. S. Krishna-swami Aiyangar Commemoration Volume* (Madras, G.S. Press, 1936), p. 423.]

50. *Paṭvin Līlā*

A woman who makes beaded belts comes to Rādhā from Nandgāṇv and delights her with accounts of the laudable doings of Kṛishṇa. The companions of Rādhā, less credulous than she, examine the 'paṭvin' and find Kṛishṇa beneath the disguise. (*RCV*, 35; see *Patwa* in Crooke, 4, 172 ff.)

51. *Panghaṭ Līlā*

When the gopīs come to the Jamunā to fill their waterpots, Kṛishṇa bars their way and demands a tax of butter and sugar candy. He claims ownership of the river and reads a high-sounding title deed. After a struggle the gopīs submit. (*BV*; *Sūrsāgar*, 1, 746-64.)

52. *Pāñṛe Līlā* (or *Brāhmaṇ Bhojan Līlā*)

A priest at the house of Nand prepares rice pudding to offer during worship. While his eyes are closed in invocation, baby Kṛishṇa creeps up and eats the rice. The priest prepares another dish, and again the same thing happens. The priest complains to Yaśodā, who scolds the child. Kṛishṇa explains, 'When my devotee calls, I surely come and accept what he offers!' (*BV*, 53.)

53. *Pūtanā Uddhār Līlā* (or *Pūtanābadh Līlā*)

A female demon attempts to kill the infant Kṛishṇa by suckling him at a poisoned breast. Kṛishṇa sucks the very life out of her. (*BP* X.6.)

54. *Prathamānurāg Līlā*

When Rādhā is born to Kīrttī and Vṛishabhānu, the child Kṛishṇa accompanies Nand on a visit to offer congratulations. When Kṛishṇa enters the room, the sleeping baby opens her eyes and smiles.

55. *Pralambāsur Uddhār Līlā*

Balrām kills the demon named Pralamba. (*BP* X.18 f.)

56. *Premparīkshā Līlā*

To test Kṛishṇa's loyalty, Rādhā sends a gopī to say there is a girl who would like to see him very much. Kṛishṇa replies that he will see no one but Rādhā. Delighted with his constancy, Rādhā comes to him at once.

57. *Premsaṃpuṭ Līlā*

While Kṛishṇa is visiting Rādhā in female disguise, Rādhā praises Kṛishṇa's virtues. The female visitor says she will believe that Rādhā's love is true only if she can summon Kṛishṇa into her presence by meditating on him. Rādhā goes into meditation. While her eyes are shut, Kṛishṇa removes his disguise.

58. *Banjārau Līlā*

Rādhā, now the wife of Kṛishṇa, wishes to make the annual visit to her father's house, but no one has come to escort her. Through a passing cattle dealer she sends a tearful message, and her brother Śrīdāmā comes to take her



away. (RCV, 125. See *Banjāra* in R. V. Russell and Hira Lal, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, 2, 162–92; Crooke, 1, 164.)

59. *Baṅsī Līlā*

Some gopīs denounce Kṛishṇa's flute because it distracts them from their duties. Rādhā confesses that it moves her to such love for Kṛishṇa that she cares nothing for public opinion but openly stares at him, fearing only that her doting gaze will bring discredit to him. Kṛishṇa declares that her loving glance is his greatest treasure.

60. *Bahulā Līlā*

The cow Bahulā, attacked by a lion, obtains permission to go and give suck to her calf before being eaten. Then she returns faithfully, to be devoured. Kṛishṇa appears and gives salvation to both cow and lion.

61. *Bāl Saṁvāraṇ Līlā*

Kṛishṇa wishes to comb and adorn Rādhā's hair. After a conflict with the gopīs he is allowed to do so.

62. *Bisātin Līlā*

Disguised as a female jewel merchant, Kṛishṇa bestows on Rādhā without cost such splendid ornaments that Rādhā embraces the vendor. Kṛishṇa is overwhelmed with emotion, falls into a swoon, and is discovered. (RCV, 32. See *Ramaiya* in Crooke, 4, 224.)

63. *Bīṇāvārī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa, disguised as a musician, plays the *vīṇā* before Rādhā with great emotional effect. But the musician, too, is affected and begins to perform in ecstasy certain dances that are characteristic of Kṛishṇa. A suspicious gopī begins to rub perfume on the bodices of all the women present. Kṛishṇa's disguise is inadequate for this test, and he is caught. (RCV, 78.)

64. *Brajyātrā Līlā*

A miserly gopī goes on the Braj pilgrimage. Her heart remains with her house and wealth, and she returns time after time to check on her property. Kṛishṇa breaks into her house, and when he is finished, she has nothing more to worry about.

65. *Brahmcārī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa comes to the gopīs as a palmist who claims to tell present, past, and future. Thus he is able to hold the hands of all the gopīs and to predict for Rādhā a dark man in her future. (RCV, 94.)

66. *Brahmā Līlā*

At the time of the birth of Kṛishṇa, Brahmā makes a congratulatory visit upon Nand and Yaśodā. They honor him and offer every sort of gift, but he accepts only a piece of yellow cloth in which the baby had once been wrapped.

67. *Brahmāvyāmoh Līlā*

Seeing that Kṛishṇa eats the leftovers of the cowherds, Brahmā doubts his divinity and tests it by stealing away all the herds and herdsmen. Kṛishṇa miraculously creates duplicates of the stolen cattle and their keepers. Convinced, Brahmā falls at the feet of Kṛishṇa. (BP X.13.)

68. *Bhañvarā Vārī Līlā*

A black bee annoys Rādhā at mealtime. Kṛishṇa rises and drives it out. A gopī says, 'The black bee has flown away.' Rādhā thinks it is Kṛishṇa that has gone, and weeps.

69. *Maṇi Khambh Līlā*

Kṛishṇa enters a gopī's house and steals butter from a pot which stands before a polished mirror. He becomes angry with his mute companion in the mirror who mocks, refuses to eat a share of the loot, and quarrels with him. (See W. Norman Brown, 'Early Vaishnava Miniature Paintings from Western India', *Eastern Art*, 2 (1930), pl. CII, fig. 4, and p. 187.)

70. *Mathurāgaman Līlā*

Sending Akrūr as messenger, King Kaṇṣ invites Kṛishṇa to come to Mathurā. Kṛishṇa accompanies Akrūr after taking leave of the weeping gopīs. While the travelers are resting at the riverside, Akrūr sees a vision of Kṛishṇa and Balrām seated in a chariot beneath the water. (BP X.39 f.)

71. *Mathurā Praveś Līlā*

Entering Mathurā, Kṛishṇa and Balrām seize the royal clothing from the king's washerman. The royal gardener gladly gives his flowers to them. Kubjā's humped back is straightened. King Kaṇṣ' bow is snapped, and his fierce elephant is slain. (BP X.41.)

72. *Manihārīn Līlā*

Kṛishṇa goes to Rādhā in the disguise of a bangle-seller. While fitting bracelets on Rādhā's arm, he trembles so with emotion that his identity is betrayed. (KLR, 3, 149. Crooke, 2, 230 ff. Rāmaśaṅkar Velāji, *Rāslīlā*, Bombay, Nirṇaysāgar Press, samvat 1942 [A.D. 1885], pp. 63–68.)

73. *Mall Līlā*

In the arena at Mathurā Kṛishṇa slays the champion wrestlers of King Kaṇṣ. (Usually a sub-episode in the *Kaṇṣbadh Līlā*.) (BP X.43.)

74. *Mahādev Līlā*

Rādhā's mother, Kīrtī, asks the counsel of the god Mahādev regarding a proposal that Rādhā be married to Kṛishṇa, who is of good family but has the bad habit of stealing. Going into a trance, Mahādev communes about the problem with the god of his special devotion. Since this isṭhadevatā is Kṛishṇa

himself, Mahādev's report to Kīrttī is that the marriage would be most auspicious. (Rāmaśaṅkar Velāji, *Rāslīlā*, pp. 55–59.)

75. *Mahārās Līlā* (or *Rāsapañcādhyaī Līlā*)

Kāmdev challenges Kṛishṇa to a battle with him, so Kṛishṇa summons the gopīs with his flute. He rebukes them for leaving their husbands. They insist that Kṛishṇa is their real husband. He relents and dances with them. In the midst of the dance Kāmdev attacks Kṛishṇa but is defeated. The gopīs become proud because of Kṛishṇa's favors, so he disappears. They search for him, forlorn and humble. Satisfied, Kṛishṇa returns and dances the mahārās dance with them, multiplying his forms so that each gopī may have him as partner. (BP, X.29–33. W. Norman Brown, *Eastern Art*, 2 (1930), pl. CIV, fig. 8, and p. 189.)

76. *Mān Līlā*

Rādhā dreams that Kṛishṇa has left her and gone flirting with others. Waking and finding Kṛishṇa absent, she is convinced that the dream is true, and pouts. A companion brings Kṛishṇa, who appeases her. (KLR, 3, 21.)

77. *Mān Khaṇḍan Līlā*

Kṛishṇa seeks admission at Rādhā's door, giving all his divine names. Rādhā pretends not to recognize any of them, so he goes away. Repentant, she comes to him hidden under the end of her companion's garment. He has his revenge in verbal jibes.

78. *Mākhan Corī Līlā* (several distinct texts bear this name)

A gopī catches Kṛishṇa in the act of stealing butter in her house. To report him to Yaśodā, she pulls him down the road by the arm. Saying that his wrist is paining, Kṛishṇa asks the gopī to grasp the other arm. During the transfer Kṛishṇa slips into her hand the arm of a little girl who was gathering cowdung on the road. The heavily veiled gopī does not notice the change, but drags the girl before Yaśodā crying that she has at last caught and brought the criminal with butter on his very hands. (BP X.9; BV, 73.)

79. *Mālin Līlā*

Coming into Rādhā's presence in the guise of a flowerseller, Kṛishṇa claims to be skilled in massage also, and asks permission to massage Rādhā's feet. The suspicious gopīs look the 'florist woman' over carefully and discover Kṛishṇa's characteristic garland, the *banmālā*, hanging down from her skirt. (RCV, 26.)

80. *Mundariyācorī Līlā*

Rādhā takes a dancing lesson from Kṛishṇa despite the gopīs' warning that he is a thief. After the lesson her ring is found to be missing. Kṛishṇa is searched and caught with the goods. In revenge the gopīs steal Kṛishṇa's flute, crown, and cloak. In hope of getting them back Kṛishṇa comes to Rādhā in the guise of a girl lovelorn for Kṛishṇa. Rādhā tries to console her visitor by

putting on the stolen crown and cloak and playing the flute. Kṛishṇa catches her in possession of stolen property.

81. *Mṛittikā Bhakṣaṇ Līlā* (or *Māñṭīkhāman Līlā*)

Baby Kṛishṇa eats earth. The cowherd boys tell Yaśodā, but Kṛishṇa denies that he has done so. Yaśodā, irritated, compels him to open his mouth. Looking in, she beholds the gods, the moon, the sun, the sky and the whole universe therein. The stick falls from her hand. (BP X.8 f.)

82. *Maināvārī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa roams in Rādhā's neighbourhood in the guise of a woman who sells *mainā* birds. Rādhā calls the vendor in and asks her name and background. Kṛishṇa is struck speechless by Rādhā's beauty. Unable to utter a word in reply, his hoax falls through. (RCV, 64.)

83. *Maunī Jogī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa sits in the guise of an ascetic vowed to silence. Rādhā comes amid the crowd and praises the ascetic in his hearing, saying he must be the son of a king and the disciple of a perfect teacher. Kṛishṇa's joy at these words overwhelms his self-control. He speaks and is found out. (RCV, 122. See *mauna-brati* in H. A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* [3 vols. Lahore, Superintendent of Government Printing, 1911–19], 3 [1914], 357.)

84. *Yugalchadma Līlā*

Rādhā takes up the role of Kṛishṇa, and tries to woo Kṛishṇa in the female role. This Rādhā proves to be very haughty and intractable. 'Now,' says Kṛishṇa at the close, 'you have some idea of the trouble I have in wooing you.'

85. *Raṅgrejin Līlā*

Kṛishṇa comes to Rādhā's place as a dyer woman who exchanges freshly dyed sārīs for old. Rādhā takes one and gives in return some of her own royal clothes. Etiquette requires that royal gifts be donned at once, but the 'dyer woman' is strangely slow. Rādhā's companions help with the change, and Kṛishṇa is literally revealed. (RCV, 41.)

86. *Rājdān Līlā*

Rādhā and the gopīs retaliate for the constant exactions of the cowherd boys by dressing up as king and ministers and demanding payment of toll from them as they pass by.

87. *Rāsvihār Līlā*

Rādhā assumes the role of Kṛishṇa and calls the gopīs with his flute. (Thereafter the story is similar to that of the *Mahārās Līlā*.)

88. *Lohāsurbadh Līlā*

Kṛishṇa defeats and kills the demon Lohāsura.



89. *Varuṇālay Līlā*

While Nand is bathing in the river, Varuṇa's messengers seize him and carry him off to their master's capital beneath the sea. Kṛishṇa comes at once to recover him. Varuṇa apologizes, explaining that his only desire was to be blessed by Kṛishṇa's appearance in his realm. (BP X.28.)

90. *Vidushī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa comes to Rādhā in the guise of a learned woman and lectures her on the importance of certain philosophical doctrines. Rādhā replies, advocating the philosophy of love (*prem*). Kṛishṇa is pleased and removes his disguise.

91. *Vivāha Līlā*

Kṛishṇa arrives in procession and is married to Rādhā, Brahmā acting as the officiating priest. (This performance—a spectacle rather than a drama—reproduces the rites of the usual Hindu wedding.)

92. *Vaidya Līlā*

A gopī sees Kṛishṇa at the riverside and falls ill of love. Kṛishṇa comes to her in the disguise of a physician (*vaidya*) and cures her.

93. *Vyomāsurbadh Līlā*

The demon Vyomāsura, sent by Kaṇṣa, joins the game of the cowherd boys and carries all but Kṛishṇa off into a cave. When the demon turns on Kṛishṇa it is beaten to death. (BP X.37.)

94. *Śakaṭāsura Uddhār Līlā*

Kṛishṇa destroys the demon Śakaṭāsura, who has taken the form of a cart. (BP X.7.)

95. *Śāntanu Līlā*

King Śāntanu performs austerities in hope of obtaining a son. Kṛishṇa accepts cheerfully his offering of parched grain and, pleased, promises him a son. Bhīshma is born.

96. *Śiv Jogī Līlā* (or *Śaṅkar Līlā*)

Śiv comes to the house of Yaśodā to have a view of the new-born Kṛishṇa. Fearing his grim appearance, Yaśodā turns him away. Baby Kṛishṇa wails and cannot be silenced until the strange yogī is brought back and admitted. Śiv worships Kṛishṇa and goes away happy. (KLR, 2, 187.)

97. *Śyāmsagāī Līlā*

Rādhā's mother hesitates to betroth her daughter to Kṛishṇa because of his habit of thieving. Kṛishṇa's friends persuade her that this habit will not be a permanent vice. The engagement is arranged.

98. *Sudāmā Līlā*

Kṛishṇa's childhood friend Sudāmā, who lives in destitution, visits Kṛishṇa, who has become a king of great wealth and power. Kṛishṇa accepts from

Sudāmā the gift of a handful of broken rice—his last morsel of food—and allows him to depart for home without offering him anything but cordiality. On the way home Sudāmā's wife complains bitterly of Kṛishṇa's hardness of heart, but her husband defends Kṛishṇa. When the pair reach the site of their hovel, they find that a magnificent palace has been built for them, complete with every luxury.

99. *Sambhram Mān Līlā*

Rādhā sees her own reflection in the very large jewel which hangs on Kṛishṇa's breast. She is jealous of the beautiful woman whose likeness she sees there, and she pouts until the matter is explained to her. (KLR, 3, 30.)

100. *Sāñvarī Sahelī Līlā*

Kṛishṇa in a gopī's disguise comes to Rādhā's playground at Prem Sarovar and swings with her. The breeze disarranges the folds of his dress, and he is recognized.

101. *Sāñjhī Līlā*

While Rādhā is picking flowers, Kṛishṇa comes and demands to know on what authority she is picking flowers in his garden. The gopīs arrive and compel him to admit that the garden is hers. He apologizes, and Rādhā invites him to her house to see the festival decorations. (KLR, 3, 115.)

102. *Sāligrām Līlā*

While Nand is at worship before the *śāligrām* stone, baby Kṛishṇa picks up the stone and conceals it in his mouth. There is a long search for it. Detected at last, Kṛishṇa explains, 'I am the *śāligrām* !'

103. *Siddheśvarī Līlā*

A sharp word from Rādhā makes Kṛishṇa very ill. His mother searches in vain for a doctor who can cure him. The gopīs bring as doctor 'Siddheśvarī Yoginī' (Rādhā in disguise). At the mere touch of this 'doctor,' Kṛishṇa is well.

104. *Sudarśanbadh Līlā*

A demon carries off a gopī during the rās dance. Kṛishṇa kills him. (BP X.34.)

105. *Sunārin Līlā*

Kṛishṇa goes to Rādhā's house in the guise of a goldsmith's wife and decorates Rādhā with golden ornaments.

106. *Svapna Līlā*

Yaśodā wakens Kṛishṇa from his bed. Kṛishṇa protests that when awakened from the dream, he had been just about to be happily married. Visiting gopīs remark, 'Who would marry a black-faced thief like you! We would not come to your wedding even as spectators !' Kṛishṇa quarrels and cajoles, and in the end they agree to come to his wedding.



## THE UDDHAV LĪLĀ OF SVĀMĪ KUṆVAR PĀL

In the common thirty-day stand of a *rāsmāṇḍalī*, the performance of the *Uddhav Līlā* takes place, traditionally, on the next to the last day. The twenty-eighth day is the occasion for the *Kaṇṣbadh Līlā*, in which the defeat of the wicked Kaṇṣ is celebrated in a hilarious rough-and-tumble. The thirtieth day is reserved for the *Dān Līlā*, for then the *svāmī* wishes to bring up the matter of offerings with those who have seen all his *līlās* (see Chapter Seven, No. 38). The *Uddhav Līlā*, on the twenty-ninth day, brings to a climax the religious message of the entire series. The situation it presents is second only to the performance of the *rās* itself in intensity of religious feeling which it can inspire.

Because it is a subtle and serious play, the *Uddhav Līlā* is not understood and appreciated by everybody. The roustabouts of the streets who on the night of the clownish *Kaṇṣbadh Līlā* filled the theater with their laughter and commotion are absent on the next evening because the *Uddhav Līlā* is too sober for their taste. Others are fond of it for differing reasons. The merely sentimental make it an opportunity for delicious heartbreak over the homesickness of Kṛishṇa and the lovesickness of the lonely *gopīs*. The thoughtlessly devout spend the evening doting once more upon the clever pranks of the Darling of Vṛindāban. For aesthetes it is a feast of music and poetry, which are exceptionally prominent in this play because of its high emotion. But to the *rasik jan*, the perceptive devotees, the *Uddhav Līlā* is the very queen of the *līlās* because it expresses anew their most vital convictions and longings. Their passionate preference for the worship of a personal God is vindicated in the play by Kṛishṇa himself, who slyly defeats and converts the *advaitin* Uddhav and brings him into the true path—the *bhakti* path—for the attainment of himself. They delight to see the haughty philosophical pretensions of Uddhav brought low by the simple cowherd girls whose religion is naught but the love of the Handsome Śyām. The onlookers identify themselves with the *gopīs* of the play

not only in their certainties but in their despairs as well. The sorrows of the gopīs bring tears to their eyes because they express a tension in their own lives—the tension between attainment and insecurity, between occasional moments of assurance and the persisting thirst in which complete satisfaction is denied. Both the spectators and the gopīs long for a deity who has been their intimate friend, but who has gone away to Mathurā. Mystically he is still seated in their hearts, but their relation with him is fitful. At one moment the gopīs saucily declare to Uddhav that they are already joined with Śyāmsundar and have no need of his philosophical nostrums; but at the next instant they are weeping again because of the pain of separation. And thus, even in the final scene, when the whole assembly of devotees rises with the converted Uddhav and stands in the very visual presence of Kṛiṣṇa, they pray still, 'O Lord, I am in thy shelter. Give me, along with all Braj residents, vision of thyself.'

The following text was recorded in a private session by Svāmī Kuñvar Pāl of Chātā with the help of his staff of musicians. An earlier effort to record the *Uddhav Līlā* under normal stage conditions had not produced a transcribable record, but it had raised such a storm of protest in Vṛindāban that no rāsdhārī would agree to make another recording in public. Therefore Svāmī Kuñvar Pāl came quietly to a secluded place with the adult members of his troupe only, and for two hours and a half he poured into the microphone the dialogue and songs of his *Uddhav Līlā*. The author has seen three public performances of this svāmī's full troupe, and is convinced that the text reproduced here does not differ from that used on a public stage, save in several minor details. The one difference of consequence is the relative fewness of the svāmī's choral inserts in his capacity of director of the play. It was difficult for him to utter all the parts of his actors, and at the same time to support them with his usual commentarial songs. This matter has been discussed on pages 152 f. above. Also, taking advantage of the leisureliness of our situation, the svāmī sometimes paused between episodes to make explanatory remarks for the author's benefit. Some of these have been included in the text in the form of stage directions. Most of the stage directions, however, have been inserted by the author on the basis of his own recollections of three public performances of this līlā by other troupes.

The records were transcribed in the first instance by the office secretary of the Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal in Mathurā. The resulting script was read and heard again by Govind Dās Gupta, M.A., of Jhānsī. Mukuṭ Vallabhjī Gosvāmī read the author's preliminary translations and made many valuable corrections and suggestions. Final decisions in all difficult matters were entrusted to Professor Gopal Datt Sharma, then of the Department of Hindī Literature, Kishori Raman College, Mathurā. This generous and perceptive man is



largely responsible for the accuracy of the translation in subtle and intricate passages.

Some connoisseurs of Braj literature have read this specimen of the rāslīlā stage with regret. It is only fair to say that it is not the most polished play which Braj could have given as an example of her art. Its materials are more loosely strung than most; its narrative is less carefully told. Our svāmī mixes his dialects, is inconsistent in case formation, and incorporates into the play verses which pain the ears of those of the highest literary taste. We have not smoothed out any of these imperfections by tampering with the text. We give you an average *Uddhav Līlā*, the work of an average rāsdhārī who was so kind as to allow himself to be recorded.

Among the literary sources used by the svāmī, one can recognize the works of seven poets: Nanddās, Sūrdās, Tosh, Ṭhākur, Śaṅkar, Caṇḍī and Kumārjū (the svāmī himself). These authors are usually identified by their chāps, or signatory designations inserted directly into the texts of their poems. Much use is made of Nanddās' *Bhañvargīt*. But a great many of the verses used in the play have not been identified.

Many epithets of Kṛishṇa are used in the text. They will be reproduced without translation, unless their literal sense has some special relevance to the dramatic situation. Some of the epithets are:

- Ghaṇśyām—The Cloud-dark One
- Banmālī or Banvārī—Wearer of the Banmālā<sup>1</sup>
- Bipin Bihārī—Sporter in the Forest
- Braj Dulāre—Darling of Braj
- Braj Bihārī—Sporter in Braj
- Nandanandan—'Delighting to Nanda', i.e. Son of Nanda
- Nandalāl—Son of Nanda
- Mohan—The Infatuating One
- Yadunāth—Lord of the Yadus
- Ramānāth—Husband of Ramā
- Śyām—The Dark One (Rādhā is addressed by the feminine derivative, Śyāmā)

<sup>1</sup> M. Winternitz, *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 141, interprets *vanamālin* as 'the forest-garlanded.' This is not the interpretation of the present-day adherents of the Kṛishṇa cult. The Banmālā is a very long garland of forest flowers which falls to the wearer's knees. It is worn especially but not exclusively by Kṛishṇa.

## श्री उद्धव लीला

स्थान : ब्रज-वनस्थली

(विरह-शिथिल गोपियाँ कुछ बैठी हैं, कुछ पड़ी हैं)

एक गोपी :

भगवान श्यामसुन्दर मथुरा चले गये हैं और लौट करके नहीं आये हैं ।

दूसरी गोपी :

उनके बिना ब्रज की बड़ी बुरी हालत है ।

कृष्णचन्द्र नैं मथुरा ते गोकुल कौ आइबौ छोड़ दियौ,  
जब ते प्यारी ब्रजवासीन नैं पनघट कौ जाइबौ छोड़ दियौ,  
लता पता सब सूख गई, जमुना नैं किनारौ छोड़ दियौ,  
मेवा भोग लगावत हैं, माखन कौ खाइबौ छोड़ दियौ ।

उनके बिना यमुनाजी अपना किनारा छोड़ गई हैं और लता पता हैं सो भी सब सूख गई हैं, गऊन ने त्रन चरिबौ छोड़ दियौ है, अब तौ वे कंस कूँ मार करिकै राजा हो गये हैं, कुब्जा सै प्रीति कर लीन्ही है, हमारी प्यारी श्री भानुदुलारी राजकुमारी कौहू गुन गाइबौ छोड़ दियौ है ।

तीसरी गोपी :

गायन

निसदिन बरसत नैन हमारे<sup>२</sup> । निसदिन ...

सदाँ रहत बरसा ऋतु हम पर, जब तैं श्याम सिधारे ।

निसदिन बरसत नैन हमारे ।

हे सखी, जब से प्यारे गये हैं, जब से हमारे नयन जैसे बरसा बरसती है इस तरह से बरसते हैं ।

कंचुकी पट सूखत नाहि कबहूँ, उर बिच बहत पनारे । निसदिन ...

थिर न रहत नयनन बिच अंजन, कर, कपोल भये कारे ।

निसदिन बरसत नयन हमारे । निसदिन ...

चतुर्थ गोपी :

आँसुओं की धारा से हमारे वस्त्र जो दिन रात भीजौ ही करै हैं ।

कौन जाय कासों कहूँ सजनी, को दुख सुनैगो हमारे । निसदिन ...

सूरदास परदेस गवन कियौ, बिरहिन को दुख भारे ।

निसदिन बरसत नयन ।

हम या दुख कूँ कौन ते कहैं और कौन के सामनैं राँमैं ? हमारे लियें प्यारे श्यामसुन्दर छोड़ि कै चले गये, हमकूँ अत्यन्त दुख दै गये ।

## The Uddhav Līlā

*Scene: a forested place in Braj. The gopīs, some sitting, some lying, are faint from separation.*

A GOPĪ:

The Lord Śyāmsundar has gone off to Mathurā and has not returned.

SECOND GOPĪ:

Without him, the condition of Braj is very bad.

Kṛishṇa Candra has given up coming to Gokul from Mathurā.

Since then, dear, the women residing in Braj

have ceased to go to the waterside.

The vines and the leaves have dried up,

Jamunā has deserted her banks.

He eats confections of dried fruit,

has given up the eating of butter.

Without him, Jamunā has deserted her banks, and whatever vines and leaves there are, they too have all dried up, and the cows have stopped their grazing.

Having killed Kaṇṣ, he has become a king now. He has made love to Kubjā, and has given up singing the praises of our dear princess, the Daughter of Vṛishabhānu.

THIRD GOPĪ: *Song*

Day and night our eyes rain tears.<sup>2</sup>

The rainy season stays with us constantly

since Śyām went away.

Day and night our eyes rain tears.

O friend, ever since our Dear One went, our eyes have been raining tears as does the monsoon.

The cloth of our bodice never dries,

Channels flow amid the breast.

Day and night our eyes rain tears.

Collyrium does not stay in our eyes—

Hands and cheeks have become black.

Day and night our eyes rain tears.

FOURTH GOPĪ:

Because of the streams of tears, our clothing stays wet day and night.

Who will go? Whom may I ask? Friend, who will  
listen to our woes?

Day and night our eyes rain tears.

Sūrdās says Kṛishṇa has gone to another place.

Great is the sorrow of the bereft.

Day and night our eyes rain tears.

To whom may we speak of this sorrow? and before whom may we weep? Abandoning us, dear Śyāmsundar went away and gave us extreme grief.

<sup>2</sup> Sūrdās, *Sūrsāgar*, ed. Nanddulāre Vājapeyī (Banāras, Kāśī Nāgarīpracārīṇī Sabhā, saṃvat 2007 [A.D. 1950]), Vol. 2, p. 1361, No. 3236/3854.

प्रथम गोपी :

हे नाथ, हम अनाथन की सुध लेहु,  
हे नाथ, हम अनाथन की सुध लीजै,  
गोपी ग्वाल दुखी दरसन बिन,  
दीन मलीन छिनिहि छिन छीजै ।  
चरन कमल दरसन नव नौका <sup>3</sup>  
करुणां सिन्धु जगत यश लीजै ।

हे नाथ, आपके बिना यह ब्रज बहुत दुखी है ।  
नेह सजल धारा अति बाढ़ी,  
बूढ़त ब्रज, किन कर गह लीजै ?

आपके प्रेम में यह समुद्र, यह ब्रज, समुद्र की तरह उमड़ रह्यौ है याकूँ आप अपने  
चरणारविन्द के दरसन दै कैं हमकूँ या चरणारविन्द की दरसन रूपी नौका पै बैठार कैं हमारे लिये  
पार करौ ।

चरणकमल दरसन नव नौका करुणासिन्धु जगत यश लीजै ।  
नाथ अनाथन की सुध लीजै ।  
नाथ अनाथन . . .  
सूर श्याम तुम सौँह नन्द की, <sup>4</sup>  
अेक बार ब्रज आवन कीजै ।  
नाथ, अनाथन की . . .

हे श्यामसुन्दर, आप हमकूँ दरसन देउ ।

(नया दृश्य, स्थान मथुरा)

(कृष्ण सिंहासन पर बैठे हैं, पास में प्रतिहारी है ।)

कृष्ण :

यहाँ ब्रज कौ सौ सुख कहाँ ? जमुना के तट बंशी बट कहाँ ? यहाँ ग्वाल बाल कहाँ ?  
वो मैया कौ लाड़ वो बाबा कौ प्यार कहाँ ? यहाँ ब्रज कौ सौ सुख कहाँ ? प्रतिहारी, जाओ  
उद्धवजी को बुला कै लाओ ।

प्रतिहारी :

जो आज्ञा ।

(प्रतिहारी जाता है और उद्धवजी को बुला करके लाता है । उद्धव आकर प्रणाम करते हैं)

उद्धव :

ब्रज मंडल के सरताज यही, ब्रजवासिन प्राण प्राणेश की जय ।  
दुख मेंटत हैं निज भक्तन के, अैसे प्रण पाल सुरेश की जय ।  
कुमार जू <sup>5</sup> सुख दिखावन को, प्रगटे ब्रज चन्द्र दिनेश की जय ।  
संताप को मेंट निहाल करै, सब बोलौ प्रभु मथुरेश की जय ।



FIRST GOPĪ :

O Master, remember us masterless ones !  
 O Master, remember us masterless ones !  
 The gopīs and cowherds are sorrowful without  
 sight of thee.  
 Humble and wretched, they waste away every moment.  
 The sight of thy lotus feet is a new boat;<sup>3</sup>  
 O Ocean of Mercy, gain the world's renown !

O Master, without you this Braj is very miserable.  
 The current of love is greatly swollen with tears.  
 Braj is drowning. Why not grasp its hand?

Through love for you, this Braj keeps swelling like the ocean. Give it a vision of your lotus feet—seat us in the boat of a vision of your lotus feet—and carry us across !

The vision of thy lotus feet is a new boat.  
 O Ocean of Mercy, obtain the world's renown !  
 O Master, remember us masterless ones !  
 O Master, remember us masterless ones !  
 Sūr says, O Śyām, the oath of Nand is on thee !<sup>4</sup>  
 Please come once to Braj !  
 O Master, remember us masterless ones !

O Śyamsundar, give us vision of yourself !

New Scene: Mathurā

*Kṛishṇa is sitting on the throne. There is an attendant nearby.*

KṚISHṆA :

Where is there happiness here like that of Braj? The banyan tree for flute playing that is on Jamunā's bank—where is it? Where are the cowherd boys? Where is that caressing by mother, and father's affection? Where is there happiness like that of Braj? Attendant, go, call Uddhav and bring him here !

ATTENDANT :

As you command.  
*The attendant goes, calls Uddhav, and brings him. Uddhav comes and gives salutation.*

UDDHAV :

Braj Maṇḍal's crown is he alone !  
 Victory to the Life of Braj-dwellers, the Lord of Life !  
 He wipes out the sorrow of his own devotees.  
 To such a Lord of Gods, the keeper of his vow, victory !  
 The dear Prince<sup>5</sup> appeared in order to manifest joy.  
 Victory to the Moon of Braj, the Lord of Day !  
 He removes pain and bestows happiness.  
 Let all cry, 'Victory to the Lord of Mathurā !'

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Naukā līlā*, p. 171, No. 49.

<sup>4</sup> An 'Oath of Nand' would entail as penalty for its violation serious ill fortune to Kṛishṇa's foster-father Nand. In the most solemn oaths Hindus may place at stake the well-being of dear ones. See Sir George A. Grierson, *Bihār Peasant Life* (2nd rev. ed., Patna, Superintendent of Government Printing, 1926), pp. 403 f.

<sup>5</sup> 'Kumār jū' is also the concealed signature of the poet, who is none other than our rāsdhārī, Kuṇvar Pāl.

कृष्ण :

कहौ भैया उद्धव, तुम आये ?

उद्धव :

हाँ कृपानाथ, मैं आयौ । परन्तु आज आप इतने उदास क्यों हैं ?

कृष्ण :

भैया, मोकूँ आज ब्रज की अत्यन्त याद आवै ।

उद्धव :

हाँ, याद तौ आमनी ही चहियै क्योंकि आपनै ब्रज में जन्म लीन्हौ, बाल-लीला करी, गोपीन के घर चुराय कै माखन खायौ । याद क्यों नहिं आमनी चहियै ? अवश्य ही आमनी चहियै । और शास्त्र में लिख्यौ है कै 'जननीजन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी'—जन्म-भूमि के आगै सब को स्वर्गादिक के सुख तुच्छ दीखै ।

कृष्ण :

भैया, आज मोकूँ अत्यन्त ही याद आई कि जा समय मैं ग्वाल बालन के संग खेलौ करै हौ, खिरक में गैया दुह्यौ करै हौ, उन बातन की बहुत याद आवै ।

उद्धव :

हाँ कृपानिधान, अवश्य ही आवनी चहियै । परन्तु ब्रज में आपके लियै कोई अैसी विशेष सुख नहीं जासौ याद आवनी चहियै । ब्रज में आपके लियै गैया चरावै हे, बासी रोटी और माखन कौ आप कलेऊ करै हे, धूप में गैयान के पीछें बन बन में घूमै हे । यहाँ तौ आप राजा महाराजा हौ, मथुराधिपति हौ, फिर भी आप ब्रज की इतनी याद करौ हौ । मेरी समझ में नहिं आवै है कै राजसुखन कूँ त्याग कै करीलन<sup>6</sup> की कुंजन की याद करौ हौ । यदि वहाँ आपकी जसोदा मैया और नन्द बाबा हे तौ यहाँ आपके देवकी मैया हैं और बसुदेव पिता हैं । वहाँ गोपन के बालक हे, यहाँ यादवन के बालक हैं । फिर अैसी कौन-सी बात है ?

कृष्ण :

नहीं भैया, जा समय मैं खेलतौ खेलतौ बहुत दूर चलयौ जाऔ और मैया मोकूँ बुलावै ही, 'अहो मेरे लाल, अहो मेरे वत्स, नैक यहाँ तौ आऔ' फिर भैया, मैं वाके पास में आवै हौ और मेरे धूरि के सने भये वस्त्रन कूँ मैया झाड़ै पौछे ही । वा समय पै कितने प्यार सूं झाड़ै पौछै ही । और मैं उनकौ अँचरा पकरि कै कहतौ कै मोकूँ पान खवाऔ, तौ मोकूँ अति ही सुन्दर पान खवावै ही । वह लाड़ भरी बोली, वह लाड़ भरौ लाड़ मोकूँ अत्यन्त ही याद आवै है । यहाँ भैया, अेकहू सुख नहीं । अब जैसे मैं कहूँ तू वैसे कर ।

उद्धव :

कहौ नाथ, जो आपकी आज्ञा होय सो मैं करूँ ।

कृष्ण :

गायन

ऊधौ रे, ब्रज कूँ गवन करौ ।

मेरे बिना बिरहनी गोपीका,

तिन कौ दुख हरौ ।

KṚISHṆA :

O, Brother Uddhav, have you come?

UDDHAV :

Yes, Merciful Lord, I have come. But, why are you so sad today?

KṚISHṆA :

Brother, very keen recollection of Braj comes back to me today.

UDDHAV :

Yes, you should remember, because you were born in Braj and there played your childhood sports, stole butter from the gopīs' house, and ate it. Why should memory not return to you? And it is written in the Śāstra, 'Mother and motherland are dearer even than heaven.' Compared to motherland, the pleasure of heaven, and so forth, looks insignificant to all.

KṚISHṆA :

Brother, today I was remembering vividly the time when I played with the sons of the cowherds and used to milk the cows at the cowpen. I remember these things with yearning.

UDDHAV :

Yes, O Treasury of Mercy, indeed you should remember. But in Braj there was no special pleasure for your memory to dwell on. There were cows for you to graze in Braj, and you made your breakfast of cold bread and butter. You had to wander from forest to forest in the sun, after the cows. Now, here you are king and sovereign, the overlord of Mathurā, and even then, you are thinking so much of Braj! It passes my comprehension that you are casting aside the royal pleasures and thinking back on the *karīl*<sup>6</sup> thickets of Braj. If you had your mother Yaśodā and father Nand there, here there are your mother Devakī and father Vasudev. The children of the cowherds were there; here, there are the children of the Yādavas. Now, what is so much the matter?

KṚISHṆA :

No, brother. At the time when I used to go a great distance, playing on and on, mother would call me, 'Oh, my jewel! Oh, my child! Come here a minute.' Then, brother, I would go to her, and she would brush and wipe my clothes that were full of dust. At that time, with what affection she used to brush and wipe me! And I would say, grasping her skirt, 'Give me betel leaves to eat!' Then she would feed me betel leaves that were ever so nice. That affectionate conversation, that affection, I remember with great yearning. Brother, there is not even one pleasure here! Now do just as I say.

UDDHAV :

Speak, Lord. What you command, I shall do.

KṚISHṆA :

*Song*

O Uddhav, go to Braj !  
Without me, the gopīs are pining.  
Take away their sorrow.

<sup>6</sup> *Karīl* : a thorny shrub, *Copparis aphylla*, which provides no shade.

अरे भैया, तुम<sup>7</sup> ब्रज कूँ जा और मेरे बिरह में जो गोपी हैं सो दुखित हैं, तू उनके लिये जाय कै उपदेस दै ।

उद्धव :

हाँ कृपानाथ, मैं ब्रज कूँ जाऊँ और जो ब्रज की गोपी आपके बिरह में दुखी होंय, उनके लिये मैं उपदेस कहा दऊँ ?

कृष्ण :

भैया,

योग ज्ञान उपदेस सबन कूँ, जो सुख पामै नार ।  
पूरन ब्रह्म अलख परिचय कर, मोहि बिसारै डार ।

तूँ उनसूँ यौ कीजौ 'श्यामसुन्दर को भूल जाऔ और ब्रह्म कूँ मानौ' ।

उद्धव :

जो आज्ञा, प्रभु । ब्रज गोपीन के सामनै आप उद्धव कूँ भेज रहे हौ । काहू और कूँ भेज दियौ जाय । वह भोरी ग्वालिनी मेरे ब्रह्म ज्ञान कूँ कहा समझै ?

कृष्ण :

नहीं भैया,

परम पवित्र मित्र हौ हमारे, ऊधो,  
अन्तर्व्यथा की कथा मेरी सुन लीजियौ ।  
ब्रज की वह बाला, जपै मेरी जयमाला,  
उठी विरह की ज्वाला, तन मनहू छीजियौ ।  
मेरौ विश्वास, उर आस,  
मेरे मिलिबे की प्यास, जानि,  
जाय उन्हें सावधान कीजियौ ।  
सीख सौँ, प्रतीत सौँ, लिखी रस रीति सौँ,  
यह पत्रिका हमारी प्राण प्यारी कूँ दीजियौ ।  
तुम हौ सखा प्रवीण हमारे, तुम सौ नाहिं महन्त ।  
सूरदास या कारन पठवौँ, है आवौगे सन्त<sup>8</sup> ।

भैया, यह पत्रिका है और तुम मेरे परम प्रिय सखा हौ, या सौँ मैं भेज रह्यौ हूँ और संग में अके और हू बात है कि उहाँ जाय कै तुम निश्चय ही साधु अथवा सन्त बनि आऔगे । और यह पत्रिका हमारी राधिकाजी कूँ दै दीजौ और या पत्रिका में लिख्यौ भयौ है कि :

जोग करौ, भूषन तजौ, सिद्ध समाधि लगाय ।  
ब्रह्म अग्नि जरि, शुद्ध ह्वै, सो बेग मिलौगी जाय ।

उद्धव :

जो आज्ञा, प्रभु ।



O brother, you<sup>7</sup> go to Braj. And those gopīs are grief-stricken who are separated from me, Go there and preach to them.

UDDHAV :

Yes, O Merciful Lord, I am going to Braj. And what preaching shall I give to the gopīs of Braj who are grief-stricken in your absence?

KṚISHṆA :

Brother,

Preach to all the wisdom of yoga  
By which women may obtain happiness,  
In order that they may forget me,  
Having become acquainted with the perfect  
invisible Brahman.

You tell them to forget Śyāmsundar and believe in Brahman.

UDDHAV :

As you command, Lord ! [Yet] it is into the presence of the gopīs of Braj that you are sending Uddhav ! Let someone else be sent. What can those simple milkmaids of Braj understand of my philosophy of Brahman?

KṚISHṆA :

No, brother.

You are my extremely virtuous friend, O Uddhav.  
Please listen to the story of my inner anguish.  
Those girls of Braj are counting beads for my success.  
The flame of separation has arisen and consumed body and mind.  
Know that faith in me is in their hearts, and hope,  
And thirst for meeting me ; go and bring them to themselves.  
Please give to her who is dear as life to me  
This letter of advice, written sincerely and according to the code of love.  
You are my wise companion ; there is none more eminent than you.  
I am sending you for this reason. You will return a saint.<sup>8</sup> Thus says Sūrdās.

O brother, this is the letter. And you are my dearest friend ; for this reason I am sending you. And along with this there is one more thing : After going there, you will undoubtedly become a holy man or a saint. And give this letter of mine to Rādhikā. And it is written in this letter,

Perform yoga, cast away ornaments,  
taking up effective abstract contemplation.  
Burned and made pure in the fire of Brahman,  
you will go and meet Him soon.

UDDHAV :

As you command, Lord.

<sup>7</sup> *Tum* : (sic.) Accepted grammar requires *tū*.

<sup>8</sup> Irony. Uddhav imagines he will become famed for success in preaching advaita to the gopīs, but his sainthood will come through defeat and conversion to the *bhaktimārga*.

कृष्ण :  
और भैया,

गायन

हे ललिते, बृषभानुसुते, मैंने कौन कियौ अपराध तुम्हारौ ?  
काढ़ि दियौ ब्रजमंडल ते अब और हू दुःख रह्यौ कछु भारौ ?  
अपनौ करि लेउ, यही मोहि देउ, कुंज कुटी जमुना कौ किनारौ ।  
अपनौ करि जान, दया की निधान, भई सो भई, अब वेगि सम्हारौ ।

अरे भैया, श्रीराधिकाजी सैं यह मेरी बिनती कह दीजो ।

गायन

श्री राधा, बाधा हरि मेरी ।  
को सुख लहै, कृपा बिन तेरी ।  
तेरी कृपा सौँ रास रस पायौ ।  
तेरी कृपा सौँ रास रचायौ ।  
क्यों काढ़्यौ ब्रज देस ते सो लिख भेज सँदेस ।  
हौं चेरौ श्री राधिका, रिनियाँ रहूँ हमेस ।  
मैं ऋणियाँ बृषभानुदुलारी ।  
दरशन दै, करि चूक क्षमा री ।

भैया, ये सँदेस मेरौ कह दीजो । और भैया सौँ कह दीजो कै हम द्वै चार दिना में आमेंगे । और  
मोय ब्रज की जो जो वस्तु यादप्यारी लगैं हैं उनकी मैं तो कूँ बताऊँ :

ये, कामरी लकुट मोहि भूलत ना अेक पल,  
धुँघची<sup>१</sup> न बिसारौ जाकी माल उर धारे हैं ।  
जा दिन ते छाकैं छूट गई ग्वालन की,  
ता दिन ते भोजन न पावत सवारे हैं ।  
भनै यदुवंश जो पै नेह नँद वंश जू कौ,  
बंसी न बिसारौ जो पै बाँस बिस्तारे हैं ।

ऊधो ब्रज जैयो, भैया सौँ कहियो कि हम रिनियाँ तुम्हारे हैं । भैया,

कौन बिधि पाऊँ, यह कर्म बलवान उदै,  
छाछ छछिया ब्रज भामिनी कौ भात है ।  
मुक्ति जो पदारथ सो दै चुक्यौ जती कूँ,  
अब देउँ कहा जननी कौ यासौँ सकुचात है ।  
विधि नै बनाई कौन विध मैट सकै,  
याही सौँ सोँचत रहत दिन रात है ।  
ऊधौ, ब्रज जैयौ, भैया सूँ समुझाय कहियौ,  
कि जापै रिन बाढ़ै सो बिदेस उठि जात है ।

KṚISHṆA :

O brother, say also :

*Song*

O Lalitā, O Daughter of Vṛishabhānu,  
What offense have I given you?  
You have turned me out of Braj :  
Is there any affliction left that is heavier?  
Make me your own, and grant me only this :  
As my cottage, the groves upon Jamunā's bank.  
Knowing me to be yours, O Treasury of Mercy,  
Let bygones be bygones. Now give support quickly.

O brother, please convey my request to the revered Rādhā,

*Song*

Srī Rādhā, remove my distress !  
Who can have happiness, without your grace ?  
By your grace I obtained the nectar of the rās ;  
By your grace I performed the rās.  
Why have you turned me out of the Braj country ?  
Please send a written message.  
Rādhā, I am indeed your slave—  
Shall remain your debtor forever.  
I am your debtor, O darling Daughter of Vṛishabhānu.  
Let me see you ; forgive my mistake.

Brother, please give this message of mine, and please tell mother that we shall come in a few days. And I shall explain to you all those things of Braj that I remember and love :

My blanket and stick—these I do not forget one moment.  
I will not forget the *guñjā* seeds,<sup>9</sup> a necklace of which I wore on my breast.  
Since the day when the cowherd boys' lunches were stopped—  
Since that day, I have not been getting food in the morning.  
They say I am of the Yadu family, but my love is for the family of Nand.  
I shall not forget my flute which was made of bamboo.

Udho, please go to Braj. Brother, please tell mother I am her debtor. Brother,

How can I bring into the ascendancy that strong karma  
Whereby I can get the Braj woman's buttermilk in a buttermilk  
pot, and boiled rice?

*Mukti* is a thing which I have given away to the ascetics :  
Now, what to give to mother? I hesitate because of this.  
How can one blot out what is set by fate?

I keep pondering day and night on this.  
Uddhav, please go to Braj and make mother understand  
That he on whom the debts pile up,  
runs away to another country !

<sup>9</sup> *Ghuñghcī*. Sanskrit *guñjā*. *Abrus precatorius*, a bush bearing a small red seed with a black dot, used as a weight and in children's beads.

भैया, मेरे पास सबसौं अधिक वस्तु है मुक्ति । जाके ऊपर मैं अत्यन्त प्रसन्न है जाऊँ हूँ वा कूँ मुक्ति दऊँ हूँ । पूतना मेरे लिये मारिबे आई परन्तु मैंने मारिबे वारी हूँ कूँ मुक्ति दीन्ही । तौ मैया ने पारचौ, पनास्यौ, बड़ौ कियौ, वाके लिये कहा दऊँ ? मैया कूँ कछू विशेष चाहिये । मुक्ति ते बढ़ती मेरे पास कछू है नहीं । यही मेरे ऊपर मातापितान कौ अत्यन्त ऋण बढ़ि गयौ, या कूँ मैं चुकाइबे में असमर्थ रह्यौ, तौ छोड़ि कै ब्रज मथुरा चलयौ आयौ ।

उद्धव :

जो आज्ञा, प्रभु :

करत हौ बिलाप आप इतौ घनश्याम काहे ?  
 सोई प्यारे कुमारजू राखौ नैक . . . मन में ।  
 ब्रज कूँ मैं जाऊँ, सिखाऊँ ब्रह्म ज्ञान उपदेस,  
 छोरै धूर बार और तपै जाय बन में ।  
 ब्रज की ब्रज नारी, भारी करै याद तिहारी,  
 तुम्हें भूलै बनवारी, और रमावै खाक तन में ।  
 नाथ के चरणन की खाऊँ सौगंध मैं,  
 ब्रज ते बदलि प्रभु, आऊँ दो दिन में ।

महाराज, मैं ब्रजवासिन कूँ असौ करि आउंगो कि जो आप कूँ भूल जायेंगे । आप बृथई—बृथा में—इतनौ दुख पा रहे हौ ।

कृष्ण :

नाहिं भैया, मेरी मैया सौं और हू कह दीजौ ।

गायन

ऊधौ, मैया ते सुनैयौ,  
 ऊधौ, मैया ते सुनैयौ ।  
 तेरौ लाला दुख पावै, मैया,  
 मैया ते सुनैयौ ।  
 ना कोऊ मुख धोवै ताते जल, अँचरा पौँछि सम्हारै, मैया ।  
 माखन रोटी नाम न जानौ,  
 माखन रोटी नाम न जानौ, कनुआँ कह मोहि कौन पुकारै, भैया ।  
 मैया ते सुनैयौ, तेरौ लाला दुख पावै, भैया  
 मैया ते सुनैयौ ।  
 हाँ . . . आँ . . . आँ . . .

बाबा नन्द उँगरिया गह नित, पाँयन चलन सिखावै, भैया ।  
 थक्यौ जान कनियाँ हँसि लेतौ,  
 थक्यौ जान कनियाँ हँसि लेतौ, घर पौँछ हिय सौं लिपटावै, भैया ।  
 मैया ते सुनैयौ, तेरौ लाला दुख पावै, भैया ।  
 मैया ते सुनैयौ ।  
 हाँ . . . आँ . . . आँ . . .



Brother, the highest thing I have is salvation; to those with whom I am supremely pleased, I grant salvation. Pūtanā came to kill me, but I gave salvation even to her who was about to kill me. Now mother brought me up, nourished, and reared me. What shall I give to her? There must be something special for mother. I have nothing greater than salvation. For this reason my immense debt to mother and father increased, and I was incapable of paying it off. So I left Braj and came to Mathurā.

UDDHAV :

As you command, Lord.

O Ghanśyām, why are you pining so much?  
Have a little patience, sweet prince.  
I shall go to Braj and preach the philosophy of Brahman.  
They will give up house and home, go into the forest,  
and perform asceticisms.  
The women of Braj remember you keenly.  
They will forget you, O Banvārī, and put ashes on  
their bodies [i.e. become ascetics].  
I take an oath by the feet of the Lord  
That I shall come back from Braj in two days.

O King, I shall come back after making the Braj residents forget you. It is in vain that you have been feeling such anxiety.

KṚISHṆA :

No, brother. Please tell my mother this also :

*Song*

O Uddhav, please tell mother !  
O Uddhav, please tell mother !  
'Your son is feeling miserable, mother.'  
Please tell mother,  
'No one washes my face with warm water, nor tidies  
me up with the end of her garment, mother.  
I have not known even the name of butter and bread,  
I have not known even the name of butter and bread.'  
Who would call me, saying 'Kanuān!' O brother?  
Please tell mother her son is feeling miserable, brother.  
Please tell mother !  
Oh! Oh! Oh!

Father Nand, making me grasp his finger,  
Each day taught me to walk, O brother.  
Knowing me to be tired, with a smile  
He would take me on his lap.  
Knowing me to be tired, with a smile  
He would take me on his lap.  
Wiping the dust away, he would press me to his bosom, brother.  
Please tell mother, 'Your boy is feeling miserable, mother.'  
Please tell mother.  
Oh! Oh! Oh!

बन में भूखी होय कन्हैया, जलदी छाक पठावै, भैया  
बन में भूखी होय कन्हैया, जलदी छाक पठावै, भैया  
ऐसौ सुख कोटि तन धरिकै,  
ऐसौ सुख कोटि तन धरिकै, ब्रह्मा विचारौ हू नहि पावै, भैया  
मैया ते सुनैयौ, तेरौ लाला दुख पावै, भैया ।  
मैया ते सुनैयौ ।  
हाँ . . . आँ . . . आँ . . .  
आवैं दैन उरानौ गोपी अेक चित्त नहि लावै, भैया ।  
हाँ, आवैं दैन उरानौ गोपी अेक चित्त नहि लावै, भैया ।  
इतनी बिनती कहियो,  
इतनी बिनती कहियो, भैया, ऋणियाँ तेरौ लाल कहावै, मैया  
मैया ते सुनैयौ, तेरौ लाला दुख पावै, मैया  
मैया ते सुनैयौ ।

(उद्धवजी चले और मार्ग में कुब्जा मिली)

कुब्जा :

क्यों भैया उद्धव, तुम ब्रज कूँ जा रहे हो ?

उद्धव :

हाँ, महारानी जू, ब्रज कूँ जा रहे ।

कुब्जा :

तौ भैया, मेरी सँदेसौ ब्रजदेवीन सौँ कह दीजौ कै वो मेरे ऊपर कृपा करें। जैसे कि भगवान नै कृपा कीन्ही है, भैसी मेरे ऊपर आप करें। और मेरे ऊपर भगवान नै कृपा कर लीन्ही ही, या में मेरौ कोई अपराध नहीं। आप भी मोते बुरौ मती मानौ ।

उद्धव :

जो आज्ञा ।

(उद्धव ब्रज में आते हैं। यशोदाजी के पास जाते हैं)

यशोदा :

अरे भैया उद्धव, तू का मथुरा सौँ आयौ है ?

उद्धव :

हाँ मैया, दण्डवत्, मैं मथुरा सौँ आयौ हूँ और तुम्हारे लाला कौ सँदेसौ लायौ हूँ ।

यशोदा :

कह भैया, मेरे कृष्ण बलराम दौनों आनन्द में ?

उद्धव :

हाँ मैया, बड़े आनन्द में हैं ।

Thinking 'Kanhaiyā must be hungry in the forest,'  
 promptly she sent a lunch, O brother,  
 Thinking 'Kanhaiyā must be hungry in the forest,'  
 promptly she sent a lunch, O brother.  
 No such joy would poor Brahmā get,  
 No such joy would poor Brahmā get,  
 Even in ten million births, O brother!  
 Please tell mother, her son is feeling miserable, O brother.  
 Please tell mother!  
 Oh! Oh! Oh!  
 The gopīs would come to make complaints;  
 She would not give them a thought, O brother.  
 Oh, the gopīs would come to make complaints;  
 She would not give them a thought, O brother.  
 Please convey this much of my request,  
 Please convey this much of my request, O brother!  
 'Your son is called your debtor, mother!'  
 Please tell mother, 'Your son is feeling miserable, O mother.'  
 Please tell mother!

*Uddhav leaves, and on the path meets Kujā*

KUBJĀ :

Why Brother Uddhav, are you going to Braj ?

UDDHAV :

Yes, going to Braj, O queen.

KUBJĀ :

Then please give my message to the Braj ladies, brother: that they should be kind to me. Just as the Lord has been kind to me, so should they be. And the Lord has long been kind to me. This is no fault of mine. Don't be offended with me.

UDDHAV :

As you command.  
*Uddhav comes to Braj and goes to Yaśodā.*

YAŚODĀ :

O brother Uddhav, have you come from Mathurā ?

UDDHAV :

Yes, mother. I prostrate myself to you. I have come from Mathurā, and have brought a message from your son.

YAŚODĀ :

Say, brother, are my Kṛishṇa and Balrām both happy ?

UDDHAV :

Yes, mother, they are quite happy.

यशोदा :

ऊधौ, मैंनें ऐसी नाहिं जानी कि वे मेरे दोनों बालक हैं और वे वहाँ चले जांगे। मैंनें उनकूँ अपनी लाला समझ के पारचौ, पनास्यौ, जैसे कि कोयल के सुतन कूँ कौवा पार लेय है। अन्त में वो बड़े होय हैं तौ जब अपनी कोयलन की बोली सुनै हैं तौ उन्हीं में जाय मिलै। मैंनें तौ वो धाय की तरह ते पारे, अन्त में उन्हीं में जाय मिले। मेरे न वह लाला हते, न मेरे पास रहे।

उद्धव :

नहीं मैया, ऐसी मति कहौ। वे आपके ही लाला हैं और आपके ही पास रहेंगे। श्यामसुन्दर नैं मोते सँदेसौ कह्यौ है सो मैं कहूँ कि :

गायन

ऊधौ, इतनी कहियौ जाय, ऊधौ भैया  
हम आवेंगे दौनों भैया, मैया जिन अकुलाय, ऊधौ . . .

कह्यौ है कि हम दो चार दिन में आइबे बारे हैं, और मैया, जा समय श्यामसुन्दर तुम्हारी याद करै हैं तौ बड़े दुखी होय हैं। कह्यौ है कि :

गायन

प्रात न कियौ कलेऊ कबहूँ, साँझ न चौंखी गैया।  
जा दिन ते हम तुम ते बिछुटे, काहू न कह्यौ कन्हैयाँ।

श्यामसुन्दर बड़ी याद करै हैं और कहैं हैं कि जा दिन ते हम मैया ते बिछुट कै आये हैं तौ काहू नैं मोते कन्हैयाँ कहि कै नहीं बोल्यौ। कारण, कि म्हाँ तो आप राजा हैं, राजा हैबे के कारण उनते जो बोलैं हैं नाम बढ़ाय बढ़ाय कै धरे जायँ हैं। और कह्यौ है कि यह कहियो मेरे नन्द बबा सौ :

गायन

जब मिलौ मेरे नन्द बबा सौ यह कहियौ समुझाय।  
कि तब लगि दुखी होय ना मेरी धौरी धूमर गाय।

कह्यौ है कि मेरी गैया जब तक मैं आऊँ जब तक दुख न पामैं। और कह्यौ कि :

यद्यपि यहाँ अनेक भाँति सुख, तदपि कह्यौ नहिं जाय।  
सूरदास देखहुँ ब्रजवासी, जब मेरी हियौ सिराय।

श्यामसुन्दर नैं कह्यौ है मैया, कै जब तक मैं ब्रजवासिन कूँ न देख लउँगो जब तक मोकूँ चैन नहीं आवैगौ।

यशोदा :

अरे भैया, हम तौ श्याम के बिना बड़े भारी दुखी हैं और ग्वाल बाल और हम सब रोय रोय कै आँधरे है रहे हैं। गैयान नैं तृण चरिबौ छोड़ दियौ है, और पशु पक्षिन नैं दानौ चरिबौ छोड़ दियौ है। लता पता सब सूख गई हैं, जमुनाजी नैं किनारी छोड़ दियौ है। जा भैया, तू गोपीन कूँ देख। वह कहीं कुंजन में, जंगल में मिलैगी।



YAŚODĀ :

Uddhav, I never knew that those two, who were my sons, would go away to that place. I nourished them and brought them up thinking them to be my own children, just as the crow takes in the offspring of the cuckoo. Finally they grow up; then when they hear the call of the cuckoos, it is with them that they go and mingle. I brought them up as a foster mother. Finally it was with them that they went and mixed. Those were not my sons; they did not stay with me.

UDDHAV :

No, mother ! Don't talk like this. They are your very own sons and will remain only with you. Śyāmsundar has given me a message, so I shall tell it.

*Song*

Ūdho, go and say this, brother Ūdho !  
'We are coming, both us brothers,  
Mother, don't be distressed.'  
O Ūdho . . .

He says that they are coming in a few days. And, mother, when Śyāmsundar remembers you, he is very sad. He said,

*Song*

I have never had breakfast in the morning  
Nor have I sucked the cow at evening  
Since the day we were separated from you,  
Nor has anyone called me 'Kanhaiyā'.

Śyāmsundar thinks of you much and says that since the day they left their mother, no one has addressed him as 'Kanhaiyā'. The reason is that he is king there. Because he is king, whoever speaks to him does so after giving him a very long name. And he has said, 'Tell my father Nand this :

*Song*

When you meet my father Nand,  
Please explain to him  
That my cows Whitey and Smokey  
Should not have trouble until I come.'

He said that until he comes, his cows should not suffer, and that:  
Though there are many sorts of pleasure here,  
Even then words fail me.  
Sūrdās says, when I see the Braj-dwellers,  
My heart will be soothed.

Śyāmsundar has said, O mother, that he will not be comforted until he sees the inhabitants of Braj.

YAŚODĀ :

O brother, we are very gravely distressed without Śyām, and the cowherd boys and ourselves are all going blind with weeping. The cows have stopped grazing the grass, and the beasts and birds have given up eating berries. The vines and leaves have all dried up. Jamuna has deserted her banks. Go, brother, and see the gopīs. You will meet all of them somewhere in the groves of the forest,

उद्धव :

जो आज्ञा ।

(उद्धवजी जाकर दुखी गोपियों से मिलते हैं)

गायन

उद्धव कौ उपदेस सुनौ ब्रज नागरी ।  
रूप सील लावन्य सबै गुन आगरी <sup>10</sup> ।  
प्रेम धुजा, रसरूपिनी, उपजावन सुख पुंज,  
श्यामा श्याम विलासिनी, नव श्री वृन्दावन चन्द्र ।  
सुनौ ब्रज नागरी ।  
कहन स्याम संदेस अेक मै तुम पर आयौ ।  
कह न सक्यौ, अेकाँत कहूँ अवसर नहिं पायौ ।  
सोचत ही मन में रह्यौ कब पाऊँ इक ठाउँ,  
कह सँदेस नँदलाल कौ बहुरि मधुपुरी जाउँ,  
सुनौ ब्रज नागरी ।

स्वामी :

गायन

अर्घासन बैठारि बहुरि परिकम्मा कीन्हिं <sup>11</sup> ।  
स्याम सखा निज जानि बहुत सी सेवा कीन्हिं ।  
पूछत सुध नँदलाल की बिहसत मुख ब्रजबाल,  
नीके हैं बलबीर जू, बोली बचन रसाल,  
सखा सुनु स्याम के ।

अेक गोपी :

हे उद्धवजी, हमारे प्राण प्यारे श्यामसुन्दर की कछू कुशलात सुनाऔ ।

उद्धव :

गायन

कुशल राम और श्याम कुशल संगी सब उनके,  
यदु कुल सबरे कुशल परम आनन्द सबन के ।  
पूछन ब्रज कुशलात को, पठ्यौ तुमरे तीर ।  
मिलिहैं थोरे दिनन में जिय जिन होहु अधीर ।  
सुनौ ब्रज नागरी ।

हे ब्रज देवियौ, मै उद्धव हूँ और आपके प्यारे श्यामसुन्दर बड़े आनन्द में हैं और थोड़े ही दिन में मिलैंगे ।

UDDHAV :

As you command.

*Uddhav goes and meets the sorrowing gopīs.*

*Song*

Listen to Uddhav's preaching, O ladies of Braj,  
The treasury of beauty, virtue, charm, and all good qualities,<sup>10</sup>  
The emblem of love, the embodiment of romance, producers of a host of joys,  
Revelers in Śyāmā and Śyām, the new moon of Vṛindāban.

Listen, O ladies of Braj !  
To tell you one message from Śyām have I come to you.  
I could not speak ; nowhere had I the secluded place and the opportunity.  
I constantly thought in my mind, 'When shall I find a (suitable) place,  
And, having delivered the message of Nandalāl, return to Mathurā ?  
Listen, O ladies of Braj !

SVĀMĪ :

*Song*

With libation of water, they seated him,  
And again they walked around him.<sup>11</sup>  
Knowing him as Śyām's own friend,  
Much service did they do him.  
The girls of Braj with smiling face  
Asked news of Nandalāl.  
'Is Balrām's brother well? Speak sweet words.  
Listen, O companion of Śyām.'

A GOPĪ :

O Uddhav, tell us something of the well-being of Śyāmsundar, who is dear as life to us.

UDDHAV :

*Song*

Well are Balrām and Śyām,  
Well are all their companions.  
All the Yadu family are well ;  
All are supremely happy.  
To ask the well-being of Braj  
Have I been sent to you.  
He will meet you in a few days ;  
Be not impatient in your hearts.  
Listen, O ladies of Braj !

O Braj ladies, I am Uddhav. Your dear Śyāmsundar is quite happy, and he will meet you in a few days.

<sup>10</sup> This and the following verse are found with slight variation in Nanddās, *Bhañvar-gīt*, ed. Viśvambhar Nāth Mehrotra (Allahabad, Rām Nārāyaṇ Lāl, 1944), p. 1. The next ten songs (*gāyan*) are found in early pages of the same work.

<sup>11</sup> Tokens of great respect.

स्वामी :

गायन

सुनि मोहन संदेस रूप सुमरन ह्वै आयौ,  
पुलकित आनन कमल अंग आवेस जनायौ ।  
विह्वल ह्वै धरनी गिरीं, ब्रज वनिता मुरझाय,  
दै जल-छींट प्रबोधहीं उद्धव बात बनाय ।  
कहत यौं ज्ञान को ।

उद्धव :

गायन

वे तुम ते नहिं दूर ज्ञान की आँखिन देखौ,  
अखिल विश्व भरपूर, ब्रह्म सम रूप विशेखौ ।  
लोह, दारु, पाषाण में, जल थल माहिं, अकाश,  
अचर, सचर बरतत सबै जोति ब्रह्म प्रकाश ।  
सुनौ ब्रज नागरी ।

हे ब्रज देवियो, जिन श्यामसुन्दर के बिरह में आप रो रही हौ, वह श्यामसुन्दर कौन हैं ?  
ज्योति स्वरूप हैं और सब जगह व्यापक हैं । हम में, तुम में, भीत में, दीवार में,  
पृथ्वी में, वायु में, आकाश में, अग्नि में, तेज में । श्यामसुन्दर ज्योतिस्वरूप हैं, ब्रह्ममय हैं, सब  
जगह व्यापक हैं ।

गोपियाँ :

गायन

कौन ब्रह्म की ज्योति, ज्ञान कासौं कह ऊधौ,  
हमरे सुन्दर श्याम प्रेम कौ मारग सूधौ ।  
नैन बैन मुख नासिका मौँहन रूप दिखाय,  
सुध बुध सब मुरली हरी, प्रेम ठगौरी <sup>12</sup> लाय,  
सखा सुन श्याम के ।

हे उद्धव, श्यामसुन्दर कौन ब्रह्म हैं और कौन ज्योति स्वरूप हैं ? हम काहू कूँ नहिं जानै  
हैं । श्यामसुन्दर नैं बंसी बजाय कैं हमारी सुध बुध हर लीन्ही ।

उद्धव :

गायन

यह सब सगुन उपाधि, रूप निर्गुन है उनकौ,  
निर्विकार, निरलेप, लगत नहिं तीनों गुनकौ ।  
हाथ न पाँय न नासिका नैन बैन नहिं कान,  
अच्युत ज्योति प्रकाश हैं सकल विश्व की खान,  
सुनौ ब्रज नागरी ।



SVĀMĪ :

*Song*

On hearing the message of Uddhav,  
Recollection of (Kṛishṇa's) form came to them.  
Their lotus faces became excited,  
Their limbs as if possessed.  
The Braj women, overcome by grief,  
Drooped and fell to earth.  
Uddhav revived them with a sprinkle of water,  
And, making up something to say,  
He talked philosophy in this way.

UDDHAV :

*Song*

He is not far from you ;  
Look with the eye of wisdom.  
He pervades the entire universe ;  
His form as Brahman is extraordinary.  
In iron, wood, stone,  
Water, land, space,  
The motionless and the moving, all  
Reflect the effulgence of the light of Brahman.  
Listen, O ladies of Braj !

O good women of Braj, who is that Śyāmsundar in separation from whom you are weeping ?  
He has the form of light, and exists everywhere—in me, in you, in the wall, in the earth, in  
the wind, in space, in fire, in radiance. Śyāmsundar has the form of light, is made of Brahman,  
is omnipresent.

THE GOPĪS :

*Song*

Who is the light of Brahman ?  
What do you call wisdom, Udho ?  
Straight is the way of the love  
Of our handsome Śyām !  
Showing the charming shape  
Of his eyes, speech, face, nose,  
By his love-thuggery<sup>12</sup> he stole  
All our wit and wisdom with his flute.  
Listen, O comrade of Śyām !

O Uddhav, what Brahman is Śyāmsundar, and who has the form of light ? We don't know  
any such person. Śyāmsundar played the flute and stole our wisdom and wits.

UDDHAV :

*Song*

This whole creation has attributes ;  
His form is without attributes.  
Changeless of form, detached,  
He makes no contact with the three *guṇas*.  
Having no hand nor foot nor nose  
Nor eye nor speech nor ear,  
He is the splendor of the imperishable light,  
the mine of the whole Universe.  
Listen, O ladies of Braj !

<sup>12</sup> *Ṭhagaurī* suggests pretence of sweet friendship, followed by sudden violent attack—  
'thuggery' in an original Indian sense.

वह श्यामसुन्दर जिनको कह रही हौ कि बंसी बजाय कै हमारे मन मोहि लीन्हौ, वा श्यामसुन्दर के न हाथ है न पाँव है, न नाक है, न कान है, न मुख है। वह तौ ब्रह्ममय है, जैसे प्रकाश है। प्रकाशमान ही हैकै सब जगह व्यापक है। हमारे भीतर है, तुम्हारे भीतर है। तौ उनकौ तौ कोई रूप ही नहीं कि जाकूँ तुम देख सकौ।

अक गोपी :

गायन

जो मुख नाहिन हत्यौ कहौ किन माखन खायौ ?  
पाँवन बिन गौ संग कहौ को बन बन धायौ ?  
आँखिन में अंजन दियौ, गोवर्धन लियौ हाथ,  
नन्द जसोदा पुत्र हैं, कुंवर कान्ह ब्रज नाथ,  
सखा सुन स्याम के।

उन श्यामसुन्दर कूँ हमनै देख्यौ। तुम कहौ कि उनके शोक में ही हमनै देख्यौ है। उनके नयन हैं, हमनै अपने हाथन सौँ काजर लगायौ। मुख है, जो कि हमनै माखन खवायौ। पाँवन ते गैयान कूँ चरायौ। नन्द के और जसोदाजी के लाला हैं और कन्हैया उनकौ नाम है, हम उनकूँ अच्छी तरह से जानै।

उद्धव :

गायन

जाहि कहौ तुम कान्ह ताकैँ कोऊ पिता न माता।

जिनकूँ तुम श्यामसुन्दर बताय रही हौ, वाके न कोऊ माँ है न कोऊ बाप है। हाँ, अक बात अवश्य है कि हैं वो ब्रह्म। सो लीला करिबे के लिये यहाँ ब्रज में आये और उनने अपनी लीला करी। परन्तु अब तुम कहौ कि हम उनकूँ रोय कै पावैँ, नहीं पाय सकौ। हाँ, अक तरह पाय सकौ हौ कि अपने शरीर में भस्मी रमाऔ और योग धारण करौ, जैसे साधू भवूत रमावैँ। फिर 'ब्रह्म अग्नि जर शुद्ध ह्वैँ' तौ जब ब्रह्म की अग्नि ही ब्रह्मरूपी मुख के लिये भजै तब श्यामसुन्दर कूँ पाय सकौ हौ।

अक गोपी :

हम क्यों श्यामसुन्दर कूँ जोगी स्वरूप सौँ भजैँ। वो तौ हमारे पास में असै ही हमारे हृदय में बिराजैँ हैं और रहैँ हैं। तौ या प्रेमरूपी मूठ कूँ छोड़िकै फिर या कर्मरूपी देह कूँ कौन समैटै।

उद्धव :

तुम कर्म कूँ क्यों बुरौ बताऔ हौ। कर्म करौ, 'कर्म करे ते मुक्ति है पार ब्रह्म पुर वास'—अच्छे कर्म करौगी तौ अच्छे फल मिलैँगे, बुरे कर्म करौगी तौ बुरे फल मिलैँगे। या सैँ कुछ कर्म करौ। योग धारण करौ। फिर श्यामसुन्दर तुम्हारे लिये ब्रह्ममय जल्दी प्राप्त है जायँगे।

That Śyāmsundar, about whom you are saying that he played the flute and enchanted your hearts, has neither hand, nor foot, nor nose, nor ear, nor face. He is made of Brahman just as light is. Being in radiant form, he is present in all places. He is within me, he is within you ; so he has no form at all which you could see.

A GOPĪ :

*Song*

If he had no mouth, say who ate the butter?  
Without legs, tell who ran from forest to forest after the cows?  
In his eyes he put collyrium ; he took up Mount Govardhan with his hand.  
Nand and Yaśodā's son is he, Prince Kānh, the Lord of Braj.  
Listen, O companion of Śyām!

We have seen that Śyāmsundar. You say that we have seen him only in grief for him. He has eyes. With our own hands we have applied collyrium (to them). He has a mouth, to which we have fed butter. With his feet he has herded the cows. He is the son of Nand and Yaśodā, and Kanhaiyā is his name. We know him well.

UDDHAV :

*Song*

He whom you call 'Kānh'  
Has no father nor mother !

He whom you are calling Śyāmsundar hasn't any mother or any father. One thing is indeed certain: that he is Brahman. It was to perform līlās that he came to Braj, and he performed his līlās. But now you say that you will obtain him by weeping ; you cannot obtain him. Yes, in one way you can obtain him: Rub ashes on your body and take up yoga, as mendicants rub on ashes. Moreover, having become pure in the fire of Brahman, when the fire of Brahman itself worships a face having the form of Brahman, then you will be able to obtain Śyāmsundar.

A GOPĪ :

Why should we repeat the name of Śyāmsundar in the guise of yogis? He is with us, as it is. He is seated in our hearts and has been there continuously. Then who would let go of the treasure of love and load themselves with the corpse of religious action?

UDDHAV :

Why are you calling religious action evil? Perform religious action. 'By performing religious action there is salvation, residence in the city of the supreme Brahman.' If you do good religious action, then you will obtain good fruits ; if you do evil religious action, then you will obtain evil fruits. Therefore perform some religious action. Take up yoga, then Śyāmsundar, who is made of Brahman, will be obtained by you quickly.

अेक गोपी :

जब तक कर्म करै जब तक जानौ कि भगवान नहीं मिले हैं और फिर जब हमारे लिये श्यामसुन्दर दिन रात हमारे हृदय में बिराजै हैं तौ फिर हम कर्म कौन के लिये करै? कर्म करे जायँ या के लिये कि हमारे आचरण शुद्ध होयँ तौ भगवान हमारे लिये जल्दी प्राप्त होयँ, शीघ्र प्राप्त होयँ। और कर्म हम क्यों करै जब श्यामसुन्दर ही हमारे पास में हैं? तौ उनकी जिन के लिये हम चाह रही हैं वह हमारे हृदय में बिराजै हैं फिर हम क्यों उन कर्मन कूँ करै?

(गोपियों ने अपने हृदय में श्यामसुन्दर प्रकट करे और उनसे कहने लगीं)

गोपियाँ :

गायन

अहो नाथ, अहो रमानाथ, यदुनाथ गुसाई,  
नँदनंदन, बिहराति फिरति तुम बिन सब गाई ।  
काहे न फेरि कृपा करौ, गौ ग्वालन सुख देहुं ?  
दुख निधि जल में बूझीं करि आलम्बन लेहु,  
निठुर क्यों ह्वै रहे ?

उद्धव :

मैंने तौ इनसों विवाद कियौ और गोपिन के हृदय में श्यामसुन्दर बिराजै हैं ।  
(उद्धव उठते हैं और राधिकाजी के चरणों में गिर पड़ते हैं । गोपी अेक भ्रमर को मँडराता हुआ देखती हैं और भ्रमर के बहाने उद्धव से कहती हैं)

गोपी :

देखौ,

गायन

कोऊ कहै रे मधुप, लाज तोकूँ नहि आवै,  
स्वामी तुम्हरे श्याम कूबरीनाथ कहावै,<sup>13</sup>  
ह्याँ नीची पदवी हती, गोपीनाथ कहाय,  
अब यदु कुल पावन भयौ दासी जूठन खाय ।  
मारत क्यों बोल को ।

देख उद्धव, तुम्हारे सखा जिननै कि वहाँ कंस की दासी, जो कि रोज चन्दन लायौ करै ही, उसकूँ पटरानी बनायौ, और वाके संग रहिबे में उनकूँ लाज नहि लगै है, और यहाँ गोपीनाथ कहवाइवे में उनके लिये सरम लगै । ये सदा सौँ अैसे ही निठुर हैं ।

गोपी :

गायन

कोऊ कहै यह निठुर इन्हें पातक नहि व्यापै,  
पाप पुन्य के करनहार यह आपहि आपै ।  
इनके निर्दई रूप में नाहिन कछू विचित्र,  
पय प्यावत प्रानत हरी पूतना<sup>14</sup> बाल चरित्र,  
मित्र यह कौन के ?



A GOPĪ :

People do religious action as long as they feel that they have not met the Lord, and when Śyāmsundar for our sakes dwells day and night in our hearts, for whom then shall we do religious actions? Religious actions are done so that our behavior may be purified and the Lord may be obtained quickly by us, obtained soon. Why should we do religious works when Śyāmsundar himself is with us? He for whom we are longing is seated in our hearts, so why should we do those religious actions?

*The gopīs make Śyāmsundar manifest in their hearts, and begin to speak to him.*

THE GOPĪS :

*Song*

O Lord, O Lord of Ramā, Lord of the Yadus, Master of the Senses,  
Without Thee, O Son of Nand, all the cows are straying.  
Why not be gracious again and comfort the cows and the milkmaids?  
We are sinking in the waters of the Ocean of Trouble. Pray give support.  
Why remain cruel?

UDDHAV :

Śyāmsundar is seated in the gopīs' hearts, and I have disputed with them!  
*Uddhav gets up and falls at Rādhā's feet. A bee is seen hovering about, and the gopīs while seemingly addressing it, speak to Uddhav.*

A GOPĪ :

Look!

*Song*

Someone says, 'O bee, you have no shame!  
Your master, Śyām, is called "Lord of the Hunch-back Woman".<sup>13</sup>  
Called "Lord of the Milkmaids" here, his rank was too low.  
Now the Yadu family has become pure by eating the leftovers of a maidservant!  
Why are you talking so big?'

See here, Uddhav, your companion who there [in Mathurā] has made a chief queen of Kāns' maidservant, and who is not ashamed to live with her who used to bring sandalwood paste every day, here [in Braj] is ashamed to be called 'Lord of the Milkmaids'. He has always been as cruel.

A GOPĪ :

*Song*

Someone says, 'This (man) is cruel ; sin does not affect him.  
He himself is the creator of sin as well as piety.  
In his merciless form nothing is surprising.  
Even while suckling, he took away the life of Pūtanā.<sup>14</sup>  
That was the act of his infancy. Whose friend is he?'

<sup>13</sup> Kūbarīnāth: 'Husband of Kubjā.' See p. 167, *Līlā* 11.

<sup>14</sup> See p. 172, *Līlā* 53.

अरी सखी, ये श्यामसुन्दर सदाँ सौँ निठुर हैं । इननैँ पूतना बाल अवस्था में मार दीन्हीं । इनकूँ दूध पिवाइवे आई, इननैँ उनकूँ मार दीन्हीं ।

( उद्धवजी ने पत्रिका दी । अक गोपी ने लेकर राधिकाजी के हाथ में दी और श्रीराधिकाजी पत्र को देख देख कर सबको सुनाती हैं )

राधा :

गायन

आऔ सखी पाती सुनाऊँ, यह जो लिखी ब्रजराज ।  
जोग करौ, भूषन तजौ, लिखत न आई लाज ।  
आँखरियाँ झीनी परीं, पंथ निहार निहार ।  
जीभरियाँ छाले परे, कृष्ण पुकार पुकार ।  
आली कृष्णहिं दोष नाहिं, हम जु करी अनरीति ।  
अपनौ पतिव्रत छाँड़ि कै करी कृष्ण सौँ प्रीति ।  
निरमोही नँदलाल जू मोही दसरथ लाल ।  
वे ढूढत बन बन फिरे, इन छोड़ीं ब्रज बाल ।

एक गोपी :

गायन

हम अबला अति दीन दुखी,  
दीन-बन्धु तुम नाम पियारी ।  
क्यों तुमनैँ अब टेक करी,  
तजियैँ ब्रज बाल कौ शोक कहा री ।  
बेगि कुमार जू <sup>15</sup> आनि मिलौ,  
अक तन को यह प्राण तिहारी ।  
आँख खुली रह जायँ मरे पै,  
न मिले यदि या समै नन्द दुलारे ।

उद्धव :

इन गोपिन के लिये धन्य है कि जिन गोपिन नैँ मेरे लिये श्यामसुन्दर के दरसन हृदय में कराये । और मैं इनसूँ जो विवाद करतौ रह्यौ, यासूँ इनसूँ कैसे क्षमा मांगूँ ? याकौ यही उपाय है कि इनके सम्मुख यदि मैं इनके ही प्यारे के गुणानुवाद श्यामसुन्दर के गाऊँ, तौ ये मेरे ऊपर रीझ जायँ और जिन गोपिन के हृदय में श्यामसुन्दर यासौँ बिराजैँ हैं, कि गोपिन पै उनकी ध्वजा है ... यासौँ मैं इनके—

अब ह्वै हौँ ब्रज भूमि की पगमारग की धूर,  
विचरत मो पर पग धरैँ, जो ब्रज जीवन मूर,  
मुनिन दुर्लभ यहै । <sup>16</sup>

कि जो ब्रज की रज मुनीन के लियैँ, महादेवजी के लियैँ, बड़े बड़े मुनी जो उनके लियैँ तरसैँ हैं, मैं काहू तरह सौँ या ब्रज की धूर बन जाऊँ ।

O friend, this Śyāmsundar has always been cruel. In his infancy he killed Pūtanā. She came to give him milk and he killed her!

*Uddhav gives Kṛishṇa's letter. A gopī takes it and places it in the hand of Rādhā, and Rādhā, after looking at it again and again, reads it out to all.*

RĀDHĀ :

*Song*

Come, friends, I shall read this letter which the King of Braj has written.  
 'Perform yoga, cast off your ornaments'—he was not ashamed to write this!  
 From looking and looking down the path my eyes have become dim ;  
 From calling and calling for Kṛishṇa blisters have formed on my tongue!  
 O friend, the fault is not in Kṛishṇa ; it is we who committed an impropriety.  
 Breaking our marriage vows, we made love to Kṛishṇa.  
 Affectionless is Nandalāl ; loving was the son of Daśarath.  
 From forest to forest he wandered in search (of Sītā) while this (man)  
 abandoned the Braj girls!

A GOPĪ :

*Song*

We are the weaker sex, troubled, very wretched.  
 'Friend of the wretched' is your sweet name.  
 Why have you become so obstinate now?  
 The grief of the abandoned Braj girls—O what is it to you?  
 Kumār<sup>15</sup> says, 'Come soon and meet us.  
 Thine is the life of this body.  
 Our eyes will remain open at death  
 If we do not meet the Darling of Nand now!'

UDDHAV :

Blessed are these gopīs, who have shown me a vision of Śyāmsundar in their hearts. And, how shall I, who was continually disputing with them, seek pardon of them for this? This is surely the remedy for it: I shall sing the eulogy of their dear Śyāmsundar in their presence, and then they may be pleased with me. And those gopīs in whose hearts Śyāmsundar is seated because his sign is on them . . . for that reason

Now I shall become the dust of a footpath in the Braj country,  
 That those who are the vital root of Braj may put their feet on me while walking.  
 This is hard for the sages to attain!<sup>16</sup>

Somehow, may I become the dust of this Braj, for which Mahādev and the very great sages eagerly long.

<sup>15</sup> Kumār jū: Rāsdhārī Kuṇvar Pāl here uses one of his own compositions.

<sup>16</sup> Nanddās, 'Rāsapañcādhyaī', in Lālā Sītā Rām, *Selections from Hindi Literature*, 2 (University of Calcutta, 1921), 253, with variations.

आसामहो चरणरेणुजुषामहं स्याम्  
वृन्दावने किमपि गुल्मलतौपधीनाम्,  
या दुस्त्यजं स्वजनमार्यपथं च हित्वा  
भेजुर्मुकुन्दपदवीं श्रुतिभिर्विमृग्याम् ।<sup>17</sup>

कि काहू तरह सौं मैं ब्रज की रज बन जाऊँ, ब्रज में लता पता बन जाऊँ, कि जा समय ब्रज गोपी भगवान की बंसी कूँ सुनिकै चलै और मैं वा समय पै ब्रज में कोई लता पता बनूँ, तौ उनकी जो चरण रज मेरे ऊपर पड़े, मैं कृतार्थ है जाऊँ । 'मुनिन दुर्लभ यहै' ।

गायन

कछू मेरे बस नहीं, जो मैं करूँ उपाय,  
मौहन हौहिं प्रसन्न तौ यहि वर माँगूँ जाय,  
कृपा कर देयें जो ।<sup>18</sup>

अरी, मैं गोकुल सौं मथुरा चलूँ, और मथुरा जाय कै भगवान पै ते मैं माँगूँ कि 'महाराज, मेरे लिये वर देउ' और भगवान कहें 'माँग' तौ मैं कहा माँगूँ कि :

गायन

मोर जो बनाऔ तौ बनाऔ श्री वृन्दावन कौ,  
नाचि नाचि कौंकि कौंकि तुम कौ रिझाउँगो ।  
मरकट जो बनाऔ तौ बनाऔ श्री वृन्दावन कौ,  
कूदि कूदि वृच्छन सौं जोर कूँ जनाउँगो ।  
भिच्छुक जो बनाऔ तौ बनाऔ श्री वृन्दावन कौ,  
माँगि माँगि भक्तन के टूक नित खाउँगो ।  
मोकूँ जो कीजै कीर श्री वृन्दावन कौ,  
राधा कृष्ण राधा कृष्ण आठों याम गाउँगो ।

भगवान मेरे ऊपर प्रसन्न हौंय तौ मैं कहूँ कि महाराज, मोकूँ ऐसी वस्तु बनाऔ जासूँ मैं वृन्दावन में बनूँ । कोई भी वस्तु बनाय देउ, और उन गोपीन की चरण रज मेरे लिये प्राप्त होय । क्योंकि भगवान कूँ जो कोई भजै है, वाकूँ भगवान वाके कर्मानुसार फल दै कै छूट जायँ, परन्तु यहाँ ब्रज गोपीन कूँ अपने कूँ दैकर कै हूँ उनके ऋणियाँ बने । कह्यौ है कि :

कोटि कल्प लग तुम व्रत प्रति उपकार करूँ मैं ।

हे मन हरणी तरुणी, अऋणी नहीं है सकूँ मैं ।

भगवान ने कह्यौ है कि हे ब्रज गोपियौ, मेरे जो मोकूँ भजै है मैं वाके कर्मानुसार वाकूँ फल दै कै छूट जाऊँ परन्तु यहाँ मैं अपने आपे कूँ तुम्हारीं भेंट करूँ तौ मैं तुम्हारे ऋण सौं अऋण नहीं है सकूँ । कोटान कोटि कल्प लग तुम्हारौ अक अक कौ उपकार करूँ मैं... याते मैं तुम्हारे ऋण सौं अऋण नहिं है सकूँ । सो भलौ, जो भगवान अपने आपे कूँ दै कै जिन गोपीन के ऋणियाँ रहे, यदि उन गोपीन की मैं चरण रज बन जाऊँ, अथवा चरण रज मेरे ऊपर पर जाय, तौ मैं क्यों न कृतार्थ होऊँ । चलूँ, और अब मैं श्यामसुन्दर कूँ जाय कै ब्रज कौ सँदेसौ सुनाऊँ, और श्यामसुन्दर ते कहूँ कि हे प्रभो, तुम्हारे बिरह में ब्रजवासी बड़े दुखी हैं । आप यहाँ मथुरा क्यों पड़े हो ? आप ब्रज में चलौ, और उनकूँ जाय कै सुख देउ ।



O may I be one of the shrubs, creepers, or herbs in Vṛindāban,  
Devoted to the dust of the feet of those (gopīs)  
Who renounced kin and the path of respectability, difficult to relinquish,  
(And) obtained the place of Mukund sought after by the revealed scriptures.<sup>17</sup>

May I somehow become the dust of Braj. May I become a leaf or vine in Braj, so that when the Braj gopīs set out after hearing the flute of the Lord, and I am then some leaf or vine in Braj, the dust of their feet will fall upon me, and I shall achieve my goal. 'This is difficult for the sages to attain.'

*Song*

There is nothing under my control, that I may devise a remedy.  
If Mohan be kindly, then I shall go and ask this very boon,  
If he would graciously grant it!<sup>18</sup>

Oh, I shall go from Gokul to Mathurā and, after going to Mathurā, I shall ask the Lord, 'Oh king, please grant a boon.' And the Lord may say, 'Ask!' Then for what shall I ask? (I shall ask) that :

*Song*

If Thou makest me a peacock,  
make me one of Vṛindāban.  
Dancing and calling,  
I shall please Thee.  
If Thou makest me a monkey,  
make me one of Vṛindāban.  
Jumping from tree to tree,  
I shall demonstrate my power.  
If Thou makest me a beggar,  
make me one of Vṛindāban.  
Daily shall I beg and eat  
the scraps of the devotees.  
If Thou makest me a parrot,  
make me one of Vṛindāban.  
'Rādhā Kṛishṇa, Rādhā Kṛishṇa !'  
through the eight watches shall I sing!

If the Lord is pleased with me, then I may say, 'O King, make me such a thing that I may become that thing in Vṛindāban. Make me anything, and let me get the dust of the feet of the gopīs.' Because the Lord, after giving to those persons who repeat his name the fruits appropriate to their deeds, is quit of them ; but here, even after giving his own self to the gopīs, he remains their debtor. It has been said :

Should I do benefactions for ten million *kalpas* in return for your vow,  
O heart-stealing damsels, I could not be freed of debt.

The Lord has said, 'O Braj gopīs, to my (devotees) who repeat my name I shall award the fruit appropriate to their deeds, and be quit. But here, if I hand my very self over to you, I shall not be able then to become discharged of debt to you. If for tens of millions of kalpas I do favor for every single one of you, I shall not be able through that to be discharged of debt to you.' Well, if the Lord himself remained those gopīs' debtor after giving his own self to them, then why should I not have fulfilment if I become the dust of the feet of the gopīs, or if the dust of their feet falls upon me?

Let me go now, and I shall go to Śyāmsundar and tell him the message of Braj and shall say to him, 'O Lord, the inhabitants of Braj are greatly troubled in separation from you. Why are you lolling here in Mathurā? Please go to Braj, and by going there give them joy.'

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X.47.61.

<sup>18</sup> Nanddās, *Bhañvar-gīt*, p. 30, with variations.

(उद्धवजी जाते हैं और मार्ग में यशोदाजी मिलती हैं)

यशोदा :

ऊधौ, ये मेरे लाला सौं कहियो :

गायन

कहियो जसुमति की आशीष ।

श्याम, रहौ मेरे कुँवर लाड़ले, जीऔ कोटि बरीस ।

मेरौ आशीर्वाद कह दीजो । और यह माखन है । यह उन गैयान कौ है, जिनकूँ वो अपने हाथ सौं पारि कै बड़ी करि गये, उन्हीं गैयान कौ माखन यह मेरे लाला कूँ दै दीजो ।

(ग्वाल बाल घिर आते हैं)

ग्वाल बाल :

अरे भैया उद्धव, तू वहाँ कूँ जाय, तौ हमारौ सँदेसौ उनसूँ कह दीजो । हम बड़े दुखी हैं, और हमकूँ आय कै जल्दी दरसन दै । श्यामसुन्दर के बिना . . . यदि भगवान ब्रज में न आये तौ :

गायन

ब्रज ना रहैगौ, न रहैगे ब्रज बनिता कोऊ,

ब्रज बनिता बैठन की ठौर ना ठहरायँगी ।

कुंज ना रहैगे, न रहैगे फूल कदली के,

कालिन्दी, कदम, बंसी बट <sup>19</sup> ना बिहायँगी ।

गौ ना रहैगी, न रहैगौ ब्रज बच्छा कोऊ,

गोकुलनाथ, गोकुल में कहानी रह जायँगी ।

जाय कहियो श्याम सौं, कि अबै नेह नीकी भाँति,

कछू न रहैगौ ऊधौ, बात रह जायँगी ।

या सँदेसे कूँ भैया, तू वासूँ जाय कै कह दीजो ।

उद्धव :

जो आज्ञा भैया, मैं कह दउँगो ।

(उद्धवजी का मथुरा को प्रस्थान)

स्वामी :

गायन

अेहि विधि मन अभिलाष करत मथुरा फिरि आयौ ।

परिकम्मा दण्डैत प्रेम सौं बहुत जनायौ ।

गोपी गुन गावन लग्यौ, मौहन गुन गयौ भूल ।

जीवन कौ लै करूँ कहा. जौ नहिं जीवन मूर ।

मुनिन दुर्लभ यहै । <sup>20</sup>

*Uddhav goes, and on the way meets Yaśodā.*

YAŚODĀ :

Ūdho, please say this to my precious boy :

*Song*

Convey Mother Yaśodā's blessing :  
Śyām, may you remain my darling son!  
Live ten million years!

Please convey my benediction. And this is butter. This is from those cows which he brought up with his own hand. Please give this butter from those cows to my son.

*Enter the sons of the cowherds.*

SONS OF THE COWHERDS :

O brother Uddhav! If you go there, convey to him our message: that we are much distressed, and he should come and let us see him soon. Without Śyāmsundar . . . If the Lord does not come to Braj, then

*Song*

Braj will not remain, nor any Braj woman.  
The wives of Braj will not wait in their accustomed seats.  
The bowers will not remain, nor the flowers of the plantain.  
The Kālindī, *kadamba*, Baṇsībaṭ<sup>19</sup> will not tarry.  
The cows will not remain in Braj, nor their calves.  
O Lord of Gokul, (only) the stories will be left in Gokul.  
Go and tell Śyām there is love even now.  
Nothing will be left, Uddhav, but this word.

Brother, return and deliver this message to him.

UDDHAV :

What you command, brothers, I shall say.

*Uddhav sets out for Mathurā.*

SVĀMĪ :

*Song*

Harboring a desire in his mind in this way, he returned to Mathurā.  
With great love he did the circumambulation and prostration.  
He began to sing the virtues of the gopīs; he forgot the virtues of Mohan.  
What shall I do with life, without the Root of Life?  
This is difficult for the sages to attain.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Kālindī*: the River Jamunā.

*Kadam*: Kadamba, a variety of tree.

Baṇsī Baṭ: spot in Vṛindāban from which Kṛishṇa is said to have called the gopīs.

<sup>20</sup> Nanddās, *Bhañvar-gīt*, p. 31, with variations.

उद्धव (रास्ते में) :

अहा हा, धन्य उन ब्रज गोपिन के लिये, जो कि श्यामसुन्दर कूँ या प्रकार सौं भजै ही ।

कृष्ण :

क्यों भैया उद्धव, तू आयौ ?

उद्धव :

हाँ नाथ, मैं आयौ ।

कृष्ण :

क्यों भैया, ब्रज में सब कुशल तौ हैं ?

उद्धव :

हाँ कृपानाथ, ब्रज में सब कुशल हैं, परन्तु ब्रज की कुशलात ते आपकूँ कहा मतलब है ? आप प्रसन्न हौ, ब्रज में चाहै मरै चाहै कोई जीवै ।

कृष्ण :

क्यों भैया, तू ऐसी उलटी उलटी बात क्यों करै है ?

उद्धव :

हाँ महाराज, मैं ब्रज में देखि आयौ हूँ कै जैसे ब्रजवासी आपकूँ प्रेम सौं भजै हैं, असौ त्रिलोकी में आपकूँ कोई नहीं भजै है । और ऐसे प्रेमी ब्रजवासीन कूँ आप छोड़ि कै मथुरा में रहे हौ । या सौं मैं आप सौं कहूँ हूँ कि :

गायन

करुणामय और रसिकता तेरी महा झूठी,  
जबहीं लौं नहिं लखी तबहिं लौं बाँधी मूठी ।  
मैं जान्यौ ब्रज जाय कै, निर्दयी तेरौ रूप,  
जो तुमकों अवलम्बहीं तिनकों मेलौ कूप,  
कौन यह धर्म है <sup>21</sup> ?

यहाँ महाराज, ब्रजवासी आपके लिये भजै हैं और आप उनकूँ छोरि कै यहाँ परे हौ । सुनौ ब्रज की कथा सुनाऊँ । महाराज, जा समय मैं ब्रज में पहुँच्यौ हूँ तौ ब्रज की दशा सुनी :

गायन

सुनिये ब्रज की दशा गुसाईं ।  
रथ की ध्वजा पीत पट भूषण देखत ही उठि धाई ।  
जो तुम कहीं ब्रह्म की बातें, सो मैं सबहिं सुनाई ।  
श्रवण मूँदि, गुण कर्म तिहारे प्रेम मगन मन गाई ।  
अक सखी कहती बड़ी दूर ते आई ।  
हत्यौ कछू हमहूँ सौं नातौ, निपट कहा बिसराई ।



UDDHAV *en route* :

Splendid, splendid! Laudation to the gopīs of Braj, who remember Śyāmsundar in this way. *While Uddhav circles the stage, the curtain at rear is removed, showing Kṛishṇa on his throne in Mathurā. Uddhav approaches, walks around him, and bows low.*

KṚISHṆA :

Brother Uddhav, have you come?

UDDHAV :

Yes, Lord, I have come.

KṚISHṆA :

Brother, are all well in Braj?

UDDHAV *bitingly* :

Yes, O Lord of Compassion, in Braj all are well; but what does the well-being of Braj mean to you? You are happy, whoever lives or dies in Braj.

KṚISHṆA :

Why brother, why are you talking so contrarily?

UDDHAV .

Yes, King, I have come after seeing in Braj how the Braj residents are lovingly worshipping you. No one in the three worlds worships you so. And you are residing in Mathurā, abandoning such affectionate Braj people! Therefore I say to you :

*Song*

And your tenderness, O Compassionate One, is a big lie!  
Until I looked, I treasured (such a notion).  
I went to Braj and learned your ruthless aspect.  
Those who depend on you, you hurl into a well!  
What justice is this?<sup>21</sup>

King, the Braj residents are thinking of you, and you, abandoning them, are staying here. Listen! I shall give you an account of Braj. When I arrived there, O King, I heard the condition of Braj.

*Song*

Listen to the condition of Braj, O Master of the Senses!  
Seeing the pennant of the chariot, the yellow cloth, the ornaments,  
they rose and came running.  
The things that you said about Brahman I told to all.  
Shutting up my ears, I sang your virtues and your deeds with  
heart absorbed in love.  
One girl came from a great distance, saying  
'He had some connection with us! Why did he forget totally?'

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 31 f,

महाराज, मैं ब्रज में जाय कैं पहुँच्यौ, तौ ब्रज गोपी मोकूँ देखि कैं अक दम झुण्ड की झुण्ड बहौत चली आई । और :

गायन

आय जुरीं ब्रज बीच कितेक,  
कितेकहु प्रेम कथा धुनि बाँची ।  
ऊधौ, सुनौ तुम, ऊधौ, सुनौ तुम,  
ऊधौ, सुनौ तुम, यहि धुनि माँची ।  
ठाकुर, <sup>22</sup> कौन सकै कहि कैं जो,  
विरह व्यथा गिरा बाँच कैं नाँची ।  
फेरि हमैं इती कहति बनी तुम,  
साँचि हौ, साँचि हौ, साँचि हौ, साँची ।

महाराज, बड़ी ही गोपी इकट्ठी है गई और दुखी हैबे लगीं, और कहिबे लगीं महाराज, कि 'श्यामसुन्दर हमकूँ छोड़ि कैं चले गये, कब आमिगे' तौ मैंनें बहुत-सी आपकी बताई भई बात कहीं कि तुम ब्रह्म कौ ध्यान करौ, यह करौ, वह करौ, परन्तु अकहू उननैं नहीं मानी । उननैं तौ कही कि :

गायन

'हमरे सुन्दरश्याम प्रेम कौ मारग सूधौ'

महाराज, ब्रज की ऐसी बुरी दशा है आपके बिना कि :

गायन

योग दैन गयौ मैं, वियोग बारि बारिधि मैं  
डूबत बच्यौ नाथ, नारी नैन यौ बहैं

कि—

गंग की सहस्र धार अधिक दुधारधार,  
इन्द्र कोप नाहै, जो बचौगे गिरि के गहैं <sup>23</sup> ।  
अेतौ जल वारि जिन्हैं अवनी पै न देख्यौ कहूँ,  
मुनिन पै न अच्यौ जात <sup>24</sup>, कान खोलि कैं कहैं  
खग प्रह्लाद, जो पै मिलाप सेतु बाँध्यौ नहीं,  
तौ बट के पतौआ तर रावरे भले रहैं । <sup>25</sup>

महाराज, गोपीन के जो आँसून सौं इतनौ नीर है गयौ है सो इन्द्र कोप नहीं है, कि जो इन्द्र नैं वर्षा करी तौ आपनैं गिरिराज <sup>26</sup> धारण कर लियौ । यदि आप ब्रज में मिलाप सेतु—यानी कि गोपिन सौं आप न मिले—तौ ब्रज डूब जायगौ और ब्रज ही नहीं संसार डूब जायगौ । आप फिर वोही प्रलय के बखत कूँ याद कर लेउ, अकेले वर के पत्ता पै तैरते रह जाओगे क्योंकि :

गोपिन के अँसुवान कौ नीर पनारे भये, बहते भये नारे ।  
नारेन सौं भई नदिया, नदिया नद ह्वै गये काट करारे ।  
बेगि चलौ तौ चलौ हरिजू, कवि तोष <sup>27</sup> भनै, ब्रजराज दुलारे ।  
बे नद चाहत सिन्धु भये, सिन्धु ते ह्वै हैं जलाहल सारे ।

O King, I went and arrived in Braj. Then the gopīs of Braj, seeing me, came at once in great crowds, and :

*Song*

Some came and gathered in Braj,  
Some recited the tale of love.  
'Please listen, Ūdho! Please listen, Ūdho!  
Please listen, Ūdho!' this sound they raised.  
Thākur<sup>22</sup> says, who can describe that pain of separation?  
Sarasvatī, reading it, reeled.  
Then all I could say was,  
'You are right, you are right, you are right, right!'

O King, the gopīs assembled in great numbers, and began to be sorrowful, and to say, O King, 'Śyāmsundar abandoned us and went away. When will he come?' Then I spoke many of the things you told me to, that they should meditate on Brahman, do this, do that; but they did not listen to a single thing. Then they said :

*Song*

Ours is handsome Śyām,  
the Path of Love is straight.

O King, without you the condition of Braj is so bad that :

*Song*

I went to impart yoga. In the ocean of the tears of separation  
I just escaped drowning, Lord. The eyes of the women flowed so  
That the piercing stream exceeded the thousand currents of the Ganges.  
It is not the wrath of Indra, that you may save yourself by seizing a mountain.<sup>23</sup>  
So much water has not been seen anywhere on earth.  
It could not be drunk up by the sages.<sup>24</sup> I wish to open your ears  
(To the story of) Jaṭāyu and Prahlād. If you do not build the bridge of reunion,  
Then you may well remain alone on a banyan leaf!<sup>25</sup>

King, there is now so much water from the gopīs' tears that it is not like the time of Indra's wrath. When Indra made it rain, you raised up the King of Mountains.<sup>26</sup> If (you do not build) the bridge of reunion in Braj—that is, if you do not meet the gopīs—then Braj will drown—and not only Braj, but the world will drown. Please remember again that time of the *pralaya*, when you will remain floating alone on a banyan leaf, because:

The water of the tears of the gopīs became a gutter, then a flowing channel.  
Those channels became streams ; the streams, cutting their banks, became rivers.  
The poet Tosh<sup>27</sup> says, if you are going, dear Hari, go quickly, O darling King of Braj.  
Those rivers wish to become seas, and from seas they will become universal floods.

<sup>22</sup> Thākur: unidentified author. At least three poets have used this signature, according to Rāmchandra Śukla, *Hindī-sāhitya kā Itihās*, pp. 379–85.

<sup>23</sup> See p. 168, No. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Exploits may be hinted at like that of Agastya, who is said to have drunk up the entire ocean.

<sup>25</sup> I.e., if the flood of tears is not stopped, it will become the flood of universal dissolution (*pralaya*), of which Kṛishṇa, floating on a banyan leaf in his *Bālamukunda* form, is to be the sole survivor. See *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* XII.9.21–25.

<sup>26</sup> Mount Govardhan. (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X.25).

<sup>27</sup> Tosh: according to Rāmchandra Śukla, p. 282, this poet's chief work dates from A.D. 1734.

गोपीन के आँसू नौ नीर इतनौ बह्यौ कि पनारे, नाली, मोरी, बहिबे लगीं, उनसौं फिर अक नदी जबरदस्त बहिबे लगी। नदीन सौं बड़े बड़े भारी नद ह्वै गये, और आगे समुद्र जैसे उमड़ परच्यौ। यदि आप न चलौगे तौ समुद्र ही नहीं गोपीन के आँसू न सौं प्रलय है जायगी यानी ससार भर डूब जायगौ। यासूँ आप ब्रज में चलौ। और महाराज, क्यों, मैं ब्रज कूँ देखि आयौ हूँ कि :

गायन

ब्रज की बिथा कूँ बैठ के बिहारी सुनौ,  
बिरह विपत्त परी, ब्रज बनितान में,  
चारों ओर चंचला सी चन्द्रमुखी चीख चीख,  
मौँहन कहाँ हैं, कूँ कोयल सी कान में,  
शंकर कहा लौं कहै, कहत बनै ना बैन,  
नागरी आगरी बिलोकी अबलान में।  
वृन्दावन बीच श्याम आठौं याम डोलि डोलि,  
हरी हरी पुकारतीं, हरी हरी लतान में।

गोपीन की ऐसी दसा है कि हरी हरी लतान में 'श्यामसुन्दर, श्यामसुन्दर' करि कै पुकार रही हैं। और आप ब्रज में पधारौ, और ब्रज की जो गोपी हैं, वह आपके विरह में अत्यन्त दुखी हैं, उनसूँ जाय कै भेंट करौ। श्री राधिका जो राजकुंवरि उनकी मै :

गायन

कान दै सुनौ, मैं सुनाऊँ राधिका की व्यथा,  
सो चन्द्रवदन मूरत भई साँवरि सरितान की।  
आपके वियोग माहि भूली सब खान पान,  
सुधि ना रहै दुख बरसा झर लान की।  
प्यारे, तुम मेरी इतनी मानौ बात,  
चलि कै दरश देउ करुणा निधान की।  
ना तौ वह दुख के समुद्र माहि डूब जैहै,  
फेर नहीं पैहौ तुम बेटी वृषभान की।

चित दै सुनौ श्याम प्रवीन।  
हरि, तुम्हारे विरह राधा मैं जु देखी छीन।  
तज्यौ तेल तमोल भूषन, अंग बसन मलीन।  
कंकना कर बाम राख्यौ, गड़ी भुज गह लीन।<sup>28</sup>  
कछु सँदेसौ कहन सुन्दरि, गवन मो तन कीन,  
खसि छुद्रावलि चरन इरझी गिरी धरनि बल हीन।  
कण्ठ बचन न बोलि आवत, बिरह परिहस घीन,<sup>29</sup>  
नैन जल भरि रोय दीनी, अति दुखित मन दीन।  
उठि बढ़ै सँभारि भट ज्यों, परम साहस कीन,  
सूर प्रभु असैं कृपा करि, जीव आसा लीन।



The water of the gopīs' tears flowed so that the spouts and gutters and drains began to flow; from them a stream began to flow with force. From the streams there came into existence very great rivers, and then a flood like the ocean occurred. If you do not go, then from the tears of the gopīs not merely an ocean, but pralaya, will come about. That is, the whole world will drown. So go to Braj.

And King, . . . well, I have just come after seeing the condition of Braj:

*Song*

Sit and hear the news of Braj, O Bihārī.  
On the women of Braj the calamity of separation has fallen.  
On all sides like the flickering lightning the moon-faced ones shriek  
and cry in the ear like the call of a cuckoo, 'Where is Mohan?'  
Śaṅkar says, how far can I speak? Speech is not possible.  
The urbane lady, the abode of virtues, I saw among the women,  
Roaming in Vṛindāban through all the eight watches, O Śyām,  
Calling 'Harī! Harī!' among the green green [*harī*] vines.

The condition of the gopīs is such that among the green vines they are calling 'Śyāmsundar, Śyāmsundar!' And you go to Braj now, please; and the gopīs there are exceedingly distressed in separation from you. Please go and meet them. Rādhikā, who is the daughter of the king,

*Song*

I shall tell Rādhikā's pain. Give ear and listen.  
That moon-faced one became as an image of the dark rivers.  
In separation from you she forgot all food and drink.  
She remains unconscious due to the incessant downpour of trouble.  
Friend, you should heed this much advice from me :  
Go, and let her see the Treasury of Mercy!  
Otherwise, she will drown in the Ocean of Trouble.  
You will not find again the Daughter of Vṛishabhānu.

Please listen attentively, O clever Śyām.  
I saw Rādhā, O Hari, wasted in flesh by your absence.  
She has given up oil, betel, and ornaments; the garments of her body are soiled.  
The woman placed a bangle on her wrist; it reached the biceps.<sup>28</sup>  
To speak some message, the beautiful woman came in my direction.  
Her belled girdle slipped and entangled her feet; she fell powerless to earth.  
In her throat not a word came to utterance . . . <sup>29</sup>  
Her eyes filled, she burst into tears, her heart very sad and wretched.  
Balancing herself, she rose and advanced; she showed supreme courage, like a warrior.  
After such kindness by Sūr's Lord, she took up hope of life.

<sup>28</sup> The remainder of this poem corresponds roughly with lines in Surdās, *Bhramar-gīt-sār*, ed. Rāmcandra Śukla (Banāras, Sahitya-sevā-sadan, saṃvat 1988 [A.D. 1931]), p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> This half-line is clearly audible but unintelligible.

आपके वियोग में श्रीराधिकेजी अत्यन्त दुखी हैं। या समय मैं पहुँच्यौ, मोकूँ देख कै मेरे पास में जो आप पधारीं, तौ, 'खसि छुद्रावलि चरण इरझी गिरीं धरन बल हीन', सो तौ मेरे ही चरणारविन्द <sup>30</sup> में तौ आप गिर परीं, गिरि कै बुरी तरह सँ रोयबे लगीं।

विपिन बिहारी, वो तेरे बिरह बिलखात बाल,  
गौरी सी लगत, दुक्खत सै मलान की। <sup>31</sup>  
चण्डी <sup>32</sup> कबि आह भर धरत है पग इत उत,  
भूमि पै गिरी हैं, जो धरी है देह आन की।  
साँस ना भरै, सिथल सी दिखाई देत,  
तऊ न मिटाये मिटै लिखि बलबान की।  
अतर मैं लपेटी, सो काल कुंजन में भेटी,  
आज धूर में भरे टीले सी बेटी बृषभान की।

आपके बिना जो राधिकाजी बड़ी दुखी हैं।

कृष्ण :

रे उद्धव, मैंनें तोकूँ ब्रज में सँदेसौ लैकै भेज्यौ कि तू वहाँ की मेरे लिये बुराई सुनाइव लग्यौ कि मैं कैसौ हूँ। ब्रजवासिन में, मैंनें जो ब्रजवासिन के संग में सौगन्ध खाई है मैं वही हूँ।

हैं सचेत करि भलौ, सखा, पठ्यौ सुधि लावन,  
अवगुन हमरे लाय कहाँ ते लग्यौ सुनावन ?  
मो मैं उनमें अन्तरौ अकौ पल कौ नाहिं,  
ज्यों देखौ मो माहिं वै, देख्यौ मैं विनहीं माहिं,  
तरंगनि वारि ज्यों। <sup>33</sup>

ब्रजवासी और मैं, अरे भैया, ऐसे हैं जैसे जल और जल की लहर—दोनों अक हैं।

उद्धव :

महाराज, आप झूठ बोलौ हौ। मैं ब्रजवासीन कूँ रौंमते छोड़ि आयौ हूँ।

कृष्ण :

तौ तोकूँ साँच नहिं आवै, तौ तू अपनी आँख मूँदि लै, मैं तोकूँ अबही ब्रजवासिन के संग में दरसन कराऊँ।

(उद्धवजी नेत्र बन्द करके बैठ जाते हैं। गोपीगण आनन्दपूर्वक प्रवेश करती हैं। भगवान अपनी सब गोपियों के संग में बिराजमान होकर उद्धव से कहते हैं)

हे भैया, तू आँख खोल, कर दरसन।

(उद्धवजी ने सब ब्रजवासियों के सहित भगवान के दरसन करे)

In separation from you Rādhikā is very sorrowful. At the time of my arrival she saw me and came to me. 'Her belled girdle slipped and entangled her feet; she fell powerless to the ground.' So she fell down then at my lotus feet,<sup>30</sup> and after falling, she began to weep bitterly.

O Bipin Bihārī, in your absence the maiden weeps violently;  
She seems withered by sorrow, like Gaurī.<sup>31</sup>  
The poet Caṇḍī<sup>32</sup> says, heaving a sigh,  
She who had been supporting herself on the body of another  
Staggered hither and thither and fell to earth.  
Not inhaling, she seems as if inert.  
Even then what is written by powerful (fate) cannot be erased by rubbing.  
The one who was (once) wrapped in perfumes I met yesterday in the groves.  
Today the daughter of Vṛishabhānu is like a dusty mound.

Without you, Rādhikā is very sad.

KṚISHṆA :

O Uddhav, I sent you to Braj to take a message, but you have begun to tell me the scandals of that place regarding what sort of person I am. When among the inhabitants of Braj, I bound myself by an oath to those Braj residents; I am that same person.

O friend, was I in my senses—did I do well—when I sent you to bring news?  
Whence have you got these faults of mine and begun to tell them?  
There is no difference between them and me, even for a single moment.  
As they are in me, thus am I in them, as water in waves.<sup>33</sup>

The Braj residents and I, O brother, are like water and the water's waves. The two are one.

UDDHAV :

O King, you speak a falsehood. I have just come leaving the Braj residents weeping in Braj.

KṚISHṆA :

Then doesn't it strike you as true? Well, then, shut your eyes, and I will show you myself in the company of the Braj residents right now!

*Uddhav sits down and closes his eyes. The gopīs flock in joyfully. Seating himself with all the gopīs, Kṛishṇa then speaks to Uddhav.*

O brother, open your eyes and have a look!

*Uddhav sees the Lord in company with all the residents of Braj.*

<sup>30</sup> *Caranārvind* : Uddhav's immodest reference to his own 'lotus feet' is a slip of the tongue on the part of the Svāmī, who in this and adjacent lines showed some loss of control.

<sup>31</sup> Gaurī did long penances until, reborn as Umā, she obtained Śiva as her husband. *Śiva Mahāpurāṇa* (Mathurā, Śyām Kāśī Press, samvat 1996 [A.D. 1939]), adhyāya XV, śloka 1-29.

<sup>32</sup> *Caṇḍī* : Caṇḍīdatt Kavi, who, according to George A. Grierson, was born in A.D. 1841. (See his *Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1889, pp. 129 f.). The author and poem are positively identified by quotation by Ṭhakur Śiv Siṅh, *Śivsiṅh Saroj* (Lucknow, Naval Kiśor Press, 1926), p. 96, No. 192.

<sup>33</sup> Nanddās, *Bhañvar-gīt*, p. 33, with variation.

उद्धव :

सवैया

मन में तो बसी बस चाह यही,  
प्रिय नाम तुम्हारा उचारा करूँ ।  
बिठला के तुम्हें मन-मन्दिर में,  
मन मोहन रूप निहारा करूँ ।  
भर कै दृगपात्र में प्रेम का जल,  
पद पंकज, नाथ, पखारा करूँ ।  
बन प्रेम पुजारी तुम्हारा, प्रभु,  
नित आरती भव्य उतारा करूँ ।  
उर ऊपर नाथ रहूँ लटका,  
अपनी बनमाल का फूल बना दे ।  
लहरें टकराती रहूँ जिससे,  
कदम्ब वो कालिन्दी कूल बना दे ।  
कर कंज से थामत हो जिसको,  
उस वृक्ष का कोई मूल बना दे ।  
पद पंकज, नाथ, फिरेंगे तेरे,  
ब्रज-राज, हमें ब्रज धूल बना दे ।

हे नाथ, मैं आपकी शरण में हूँ । हमें तौ आप सब ब्रजबासीन के संग में दरसन देउ ।  
दर्शकगण :

बोलौ श्री वृन्दावन बिहारी लाल की जय ।

आरती की थाली वहाँ लाई जाती है तथा राधा व कृष्ण के आगे घुमाई जाती है । इसके बाद वह थाली चबूतरे के किनारे पर रख दी जाती है । भक्त लोग आगे आकर अपने हाथ आरती की लौ के ऊपर घुमा कर अपने अपने मस्तक व वक्ष से लगाते हैं तथा आरती की थाली में चढ़ावे के पैसे डालकर चले जाते हैं ।



UDDHAV :

*Song*

In my heart remains this wish alone :  
That I might go on uttering Thy dear name.  
Seating Thee in the temple of my mind,  
May I keep gazing on Thy heart-enchancing form.  
May I pour the water of love into the bowl of the eyes,  
And wash, O Lord, Thy lotus feet.  
Becoming Thy loving acolyte, O Lord,  
May I ever rotate the splendid lamp of worship.  
That I may remain hanging on Thy breast, Lord,  
Make me a flower of Thy banmālā.  
Make me a kadamba on the bank of the Kālindī  
On which the waves continually dash.  
Make me a root of that tree  
Which Thou holdest with Thy lotus hand.  
O King of Braj, make me the dust of Braj  
On which Thy lotus feet will roam!

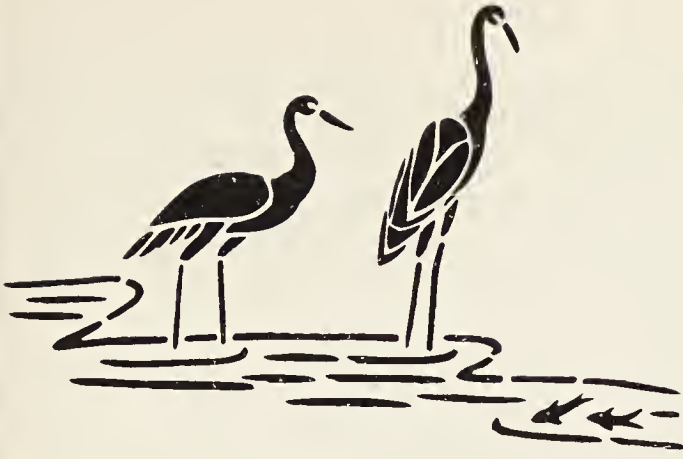
O Lord, I am in Thy shelter. Give me, along with all Braj residents, vision of thyself.

AUDIENCE :

Cry, Victory to Vṛindāban Bihārī Lāl!

*An āratī tray is brought and rotated before Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, then deposited on the ledge of the platform. Spectators press forward, pass their fingers over the flame, press the hand to head and breast, drop a coin in the tray and leave.*





## THE HISTORY OF KṚISHṆA DRAMA IN MATHURĀ

On the *rāslilā*'s history, we have nothing in English beyond a passing remark by Growse that it was Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ, a disciple of the sixteenth-century gosvāmīs Rūpa and Sanātana, 'who first established the Banjātrā and the Rās Līlā'.<sup>1</sup> In Hindī, however, there has been in recent decades a lively debate on the question, 'Who was the originator of the *rāslilā*?' The claims of the aforementioned Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ have been upheld by writers belonging to the Gauṛiyā Sampradāya. Chief among them is Bābā Kṛishṇadās of Kusum-sarovar, the author and publisher in 1949 of a booklet entitled *Rāslīlānukaraṇ aur Śrīśrīnārāyaṇbhaṭṭ*. Nimbarkite authors make the counterclaim that the real founder was a sixteenth-century sannyāsī of their sect named Ghamaṇḍī or Ghamaṇḍ-dev. The primary source of their information is a rare little book entitled *Rās Sarvasva*, written in 1892 by Rāsdhārī Rādhākṛishṇa, son of Rāsdhārī Bihārīlāl.<sup>2</sup> An effort to adjudicate this dispute was made by literary scholars belonging to the Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal—particularly by Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, Prabhudayāl Mītal and Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl.<sup>3</sup> In a class by itself stands the work of Daśarath Ojha, author of the book, *Hindī Nāṭak, Udbhav aur Vikās*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Salmon Growse, *Mathurā* (2nd ed.), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Rāsdhārī Rādhākṛishṇa, *Rās Sarvasva* (Banāras, Hariprakāś Press, 1892).

<sup>3</sup> Prabhudayāl Mītal, 'Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ,' *Brajbhāratī*, vol. 4, Nos. 4–6 (saṃvat 2003 [A.D. 1946]), pp. 6–11. Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl, 'Hindī kā Ādiraṅgmaṇc', *Himālay* (Paush, saṃvat 2004 [A.D. 1947]), pp. 64–68; Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl, 'Rāslīlā ke Ārambh-kartā,' *Brajbhāratī*, vol. 5, No. 5 (saṃvat 2004 [A.D. 1947]), pp. 12–14; Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl, 'Rāslīlā kā Uday aur Vikās,' *Kanhaīyālāl Poddār Abhinandan-Granth*, ed. Vāsudev Śaraṇ Agravāl (Mathurā, Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal, saṃvat 2010 [A.D. 1953]), pp. 879–86; Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, 'Braj kī Kalā,' *Braj-lok-saṃskṛiti*, ed. Satyendra (Mathurā, Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal, saṃvat 2005 [A.D. 1948]), pp. 139–47; Kṛishṇadatt Vājpeyī, 'Saṃskṛit Sāhitya meṇ Rās,' *Brajbhāratī*, vol. 6, No. 2 (saṃvat 2005 [A.D. 1948]), pp. 10–19.

<sup>4</sup> Daśarath Ojha, *Hindī Nāṭak, Udbhav aur Vikās* (Delhi, Rājpal & Sons, 1956).

The *Rās Sarvasva*'s claim that the rāslīlā became established through the efforts of Ghamanḍī expresses the traditional beliefs of old acting families of Karahlā, the village which, in Growse's day, was the principal center of the profession. The author was not able to examine this book personally but obtained manuscript copies of its most relevant portions. These show the historical part of the *Rās Sarvasva* to be an uncritical recording of a rather crude and fragmentary legend.

The idea of enacting Kṛishṇa's rās occurred first, says the *Rās Sarvasva* (pp. 8 ff.), to Svāmī Haridās. (His writings date between A.D. 1543 and 1560, according to Rāmcandra Śukla.)<sup>5</sup> Svāmī Haridās went to Viśrānt Ghāt in Mathurā to obtain for his project the permission and help of 'the teacher and supporter of the sect of Viṣṇusvāmī.' (This could refer to Vallabhācārya, 1479–1531 or more easily to his son, Viṭṭhalnāth, who died in 1585.) The head of the sect agreed to help, and on the occasion of a great festival when fifty-two rājās were gathered together, he impressed them by causing ten crowns of the type used by actors to descend miraculously from the sky, and thereby obtained on copperplates the rājās' testimonials or support. Then he and Haridās recruited brahman boys as actors, built a rāsmaṇḍal in Vṛindāban and on a certain night they caused the Mahārās to be enacted. But when the impersonator of Kṛishṇa disappeared from the midst of the gopīs as the Bhāgavata story requires, he did not reappear and was not seen on earth again. A public quarrel with the bereft parents followed, and the Ācārya and Haridās discontinued their attempt to organize mystery plays themselves. But they induced a man named Ghamanḍī to go and organize a troupe in the village of Karahlā. There, he got the assistance of two brothers named Udai Karaṇ and Khem Karaṇ and started a successful tradition of enacting the rāslīlā. It was carried on by Udai Karaṇ's son Vikram and has continued to the present day.

According to Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl, the modern residents of Karahlā support this story by showing, in a temple called *Mukut kā Maṇḍir*, certain copperplates and a crumbling crown of peacock feathers which are said to come from the time of the first rāslīlā.<sup>6</sup> Ghamanḍī's *samādhi* or place of burial is still pointed out in the village.<sup>7</sup> A passing mention of his name in the *Bhaktamāl* of Nābhājī, which was written some time between A.D. 1584 and 1623,<sup>8</sup> gives us firm assurance that such a person was a noted devotee of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa in sixteenth-century Vṛindāban. It occurs in a list which has been translated by Growse as follows:

<sup>5</sup> Rāmcandra Śukla, *Hindī-sāhitya kā Itihās* (saṃvat 2005), p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Rām Nārāyaṇ Agravāl, *Brajbhārati*, vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 10–12.

<sup>7</sup> Rādhākṛishṇa, *Rās Sarvasva*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Dhruvadās, *Śrī Dhruvadās kṛit Bhaktanāmāvalī*, ed. Rādhākṛishṇadās (Prayāg, Indian Press for Kāśī-nāgarīpracaṛiṇī Sabhā, 1928), p. 90.



These are they who met together at Brindā-ban and tasted all its sweetness. Gopāl Bhaṭṭ, who beautified the temple of Rādhā Raman with all that he possessed; Hrishikes and Bhagavān Dās and Bīthal-vipul, that ocean of grace; Jagannāth of Thanesar; the great sage Lok-nāth; Madhu and Śrī Rang; the two Pandits named Krishan Dās, who had mastered Hari in all his parts; Ghamaṇḍī, servant of Jugal Kishor, and Bhūgarbha, the rigid ascetic. These are they who met together at Brindā-ban and tasted all its sweetness.<sup>9</sup>

A painstaking check of the little that is known about the chronology of the lives of all these persons—too tedious to record here—indicates that A.D. 1530 and 1570 are the outside limits of the period in which all these might have 'met together at Brindā-ban.' Thus it is likely that Ghamaṇḍī was a contemporary of Svāmī Haridās, as the *Rās Sarvasva* asserts. The list also yields a suggestion that Ghamaṇḍī may have been an older contemporary of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ: Nārāyaṇ's guru, Kṛishṇadās Brahm-cārī, is alluded to under the reference 'the two Pandits named Krishan Dās.'<sup>10</sup> The intimate associate of one's teacher is likely to belong to an older generation. A seniority of Ghamaṇḍī over Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ gains additional plausibility from the order in which these two names are listed consecutively in the *Bhaktanāmāvalī* of Dhruvadās. Dhruvadās, whose dated works are of the second quarter of the seventeenth century, was near enough to these men to be worthy of attention. He places his couplet on Ghamaṇḍī in the prior position, in a survey that is intended to celebrate the great devotees in chronological order.

The verse by Dhruvadās yields the only respectable evidence available which connects Ghamaṇḍī with the rās-līlā. The lines of the *Bhaktanāmāvalī* are as follows:

Ghamaṇḍī ras main ghamaṛi rahyau,  
Vṛindāban nij dhām.  
Baṇsībaṭ taṭ rās kai,  
See syāmāsyaṁ.<sup>11</sup>

They can probably be best translated thus:

Ghamaṇḍī swam in sentiment ever  
In Vṛindāban, his home.  
Performing the rās at Baṇsībaṭ,  
He served Śyāmā and Śyām.

Versions of the text exist which show a variant reading at a crucial point (*bās* for *rās*), but we shall have to assume that the critical edition has adopted its reading for good reason.

From the above evidence we conclude that Ghamaṇḍī was without doubt a real person residing in Braj in the middle of the sixteenth century and that he was famous even in that century for some role in the performance of the rās. But these early books do not present him as the *funder* of the dramatic tradition. To find even a casual claim to that effect, we must come forward

<sup>9</sup> Growse, *Mathurā* (2nd ed.), pp. 184 f., with Hindī text.

<sup>10</sup> Nābhājī, *Śrī Bhaktamāl*, ed. Sītārāmsaraṇ Bhagavān Prasād (Banāras, Baldev Nārāyaṇ Siṅha, 1903–09), p. 599.

<sup>11</sup> Dhruvadās, p. 33.

in time to the quite modern *Rās Sarvasva*, written in 1892 ! And even then, its author is interested primarily in giving an account of the way in which the dramas began to be produced by the people of his own village. Only incidentally does he let slip an introductory word which implies that Svāmī Haridās had just invented the style of drama at that time. It is not a serious historical statement. Even if it were, we could not take it seriously because it is made three hundred and fifty years after the event, and it is offered without support from any early authority. The story of Ghamanḍī's activities, taken as a whole, can be acknowledged to have genuine historical content, but the claim that he established the first successful rāslīlā performances in the time of Svāmī Haridās is too casually made and made in a book that is too late to have any serious force. As we shall see below, we have excellent evidence that the rāslīlā was being performed before the earliest known date of Svāmī Haridās. Ghamanḍī was not the founder of these dramas but an important figure in their development in the sixteenth century.

We turn now to the claims of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ. The earliest published form of the full story of his activities occurs in Pratāp Siṅh's *Bhakta Kalpadruma*, published in 1870, and in the *Bhaktamālāharibhaktiprakāśikā* of Hariprapanna Rāmānujadāsa, dating from 1900.<sup>12</sup> These relatively recent accounts are apparently based on, or at least agree with, a full manuscript biography of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ entitled *Śrīnārāyaṇācārya Caritāmṛita* written in Sanskrit about A.D. 1700 by Jānakīprasād. Its contents are summarized in Prabhudayāl Mītal's article, 'Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ,' and many long quotations from it are reproduced by Bābā Kṛishṇadās in his *Rāslīlānukaraṇ aur Śrīśrīnārāyaṇbhaṭṭ*.

Jānakīprasād says that he himself was born in A.D. 1665 and traces his descent from Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ in the eighth generation. He says that his ancestor was the son of Bhāskara Bhaṭṭa and belonged to a family of Tailaṅga brahmans adhering to the Mādhva sect. Nārāyaṇ himself was born in Madurai in A.D. 1531. Having acquired a Sanskrit education by the age of twelve, he composed shortly thereafter his first book called *Vrajaṇṇadīpikā*, in which his lifelong fascination with the Braj country is already apparent. Some time during his adolescence he made the long journey to Braj and took up residence at Rādhākūṇḍ. There he became an adherent of the Caitanyaite group by accepting initiation from Kṛishṇadās Brahmecārī, pupil of Gadādhara Paṇḍit, the pupil and friend of Caitanya. While living at Rādhākūṇḍ, he wrote seven books, including *Vrajabhaktivilāsa*, which he finished in A.D. 1553.<sup>13</sup> Later he

<sup>12</sup> Pratāp Siṅh, *Bhakta Kalpadruma* (Lucknow, Naval Kiśor Press, samvat 1929 [A.D. 1872]), pp. 51–56. Hariprapanna Rāmānujadāsa, *Bhaktamālāharibhaktiprakāśikā*, pp. 106–12, 334, 570 f.

<sup>13</sup> Jānakīprasād, *Śrīnārāyaṇācārya Caritāmṛita*, as quoted in Bābā Kṛishṇadās, *Rāslīlānukaraṇ aur Śrīśrīnārāyaṇbhaṭṭ* (Kusumsarovar, the author, 1949), p. 25.

lived and wrote at Ūncāgāñv near Bārsānā. In A.D. 1569 he established the Temple of Baladeva in Ūncāgāñv and the Temple of Śrījī in Bārsānā and assumed the priestly duties of the former himself and put the other in charge of his pupil, Nārāyaṇ Dās Śrotrī. The biography tells how he initiated the pilgrimage called the *banjātrā*: He searched the countryside of Braj and established through mystical visions the spots in which the various deeds of Kṛishṇa had occurred in ancient times as narrated in the Varāha Purāṇa. He set up images in many of these places and organized the group pilgrimages to these rediscovered spots.<sup>14</sup> The work then describes in the following terms the activity of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ in causing the rāslilā to be performed at the stations on the pilgrimage trail:

Then Nārāyaṇācārya, impelled by Kṛishṇa's command, put Kṛishṇa's garb upon a handsome Brahman boy, and likewise the garb of Rādhā upon one and that of the gopīs upon others, and that instructed person had the rāslilā performed everywhere. In some places he had Hari graze cattle in cowherd's dress, doing in this way the līlās—the Kāliyadamana and the like, the arrangement of the floral decoration by Rādhā and the gopīs, and whatever other līlās Kṛishṇa had done, of many kinds. The incarnation of Nārada performed all the representational līlās. On whatever day and in whatever guise Kṛishṇa had done a līlā, on that day and in that place the son of Bhāskara Bhaṭṭa performed that līlā through boys in the dress of Kṛishṇa and the others. From that time onward there came to be rāslilā everywhere in the forests and groves, at the sacred bathing places of Braj, and in the bowers.<sup>15</sup>

The last sentence is clearly intended to say that Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ was the first to produce rāslilās in their most famous modern setting—the pilgrimage trail. But Jānakīprasād does not clearly say, here or elsewhere in available excerpts, that the style of drama which Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ promoted was unknown before his time.

Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ is mentioned in several other documents of respectable age. The older of these give much-needed assurance that such a man did indeed live in the sixteenth century, and all of them refer to his laying out the circuit of the pilgrimage trail—evidently the work for which he enjoyed fame. Dhruvadās

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 15 f.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. :

atha nārāyaṇācāryaḥ śrīkṛishṇājñāpraṇoditaḥ  
brāhmaṇam sundaram bālam kṛishṇavesham vidhāya ca  
rādhāvesham tathā caikam gopiveshāṁs tathā parān  
rāsalilāṁ sa sarvatra kārayām āsa dīkshitaḥ.  
kutracit gopaveshena govatmān cārayan hariḥ  
tathā līlāṁ ca kṛitavān kāliyadamanādikaṁ  
sāñjhikāracanaṁ kvāpi rādhāgopibhir eva ca  
anyā bahuvidhā līlā ya yāḥ kṛishṇaś cakāraha.  
sarvalīlānukaraṇam kārayām āsa nāradaḥ.  
yasmin dine yaddṛikshe vā kṛishṇo līlāṁ cakāraha  
tasmin dine sthale tasmin bhaṭṭabhāskarasaṁbhavaḥ  
kārayām āsa tām līlāṁ bālaiḥ kṛishṇādiveshibhiḥ.  
tataḥ prabhṛiti sarvatra vaneshūpavaneshu ca  
vrajatīrtheshu kuñjeshu rāsalilā babhuva ha.



in his *Bhaktanāmāvalī* devotes to Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭa a couplet that merely celebrates his revealing of the forgotten sacred places.<sup>16</sup> The most reliable information on this man is found in a surviving Sanskrit work of his, the *Vrajabhaktivilāsa*. Growse knew a copy of the manuscript, dated A.D. 1553.<sup>17</sup> Rājendralāl Mitra has analysed another copy in his *Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts*.<sup>18</sup> The colophon describes the author as Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa the son of Bhāskara. Its thirteen chapters comprise a mythological handbook of the *Vanayātrā* pilgrimage. It names and describes the twelve woods and numerous groves, connecting them with the stories of Kṛishṇa, praising them, and proclaiming the merit of making the pilgrimage to them. Jānakīprasād's biography is confirmed here to the extent of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭa's general dates and major accomplishment, but not with regard to his work in religious drama.

The *Bhaktamāl* of Nābhājī, in its direct panegyric on Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭa, says that he became a great lover of the Braj country, revealed all the hidden places mentioned in the Varāha Purāṇa, and that

He was an ocean of the nectar of devotion,  
always in the company of the saints.  
A supreme connoisseur of sentiment, unique,  
and a lover of *Kṛishṇalīlā*.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately the word 'Kṛishṇalīlā' is not specific in meaning; it need not refer to dramas. Priyā Dās' commentary on this verse is less ambiguous:

Taking the pleasures of the rās into place after place  
he made them public.  
Thus lived the persons of taste ; ten million blisses  
they enjoyed.<sup>20</sup>

Priyā Dās plainly understands 'Kṛishṇalīlā' to mean cultic observances that are visible, social, and of the nature of a public presentation. But his statement is still not explicit. For this reason, as well as because of the late date of Priyā Dās' work, we shall not be able to take this particular verse of the *Bhaktamāl* as early proof of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭa's work in rāslīlā.

Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭa's name occurs in another stanza of the *Bhaktamāl*, however, in a context that testifies unmistakably to his activity in drama. This stanza is devoted primarily to rehearsing the achievements of a certain Vallabh, a dancer:

<sup>16</sup> Dhruvadās, pp. 33 f., 'Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇ ati saras braj maṇḍal soṇ het, thaur thaur racanā kari pragaṭ kiyo samket.'

<sup>17</sup> Growse, *Mathurā* (2nd ed.), pp. 82-84.

<sup>18</sup> Rājendralāl Mitra, *Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts* (10 vols. Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1874), 2, 54 f.

<sup>19</sup> Nābhājī, p. 860.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.:

Thaur thaur rās ke vilās lai prakās kiye,  
jiye yoṇ rasik jan koṭi sukh pāye haiṇ.



The darling of Braj, the good Vallabh  
 gave rare pleasure to the eyes.  
 Clever in the virtues of dance and song,  
 in the rās he makes sentiment rain down.  
 Then in the līlā, surrounded by Lalitā and the others,  
 he captivates the divine pair.  
 Very liberal of salvation,  
 his fame gleams in the Braj circle.  
 He performs the Great Festival,  
 giving great joy to all.  
 The supreme love sentiment brought into subjection  
 Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ, his master.  
 The darling of Braj, Vallabh,  
 gave rare pleasure to the eyes.<sup>21</sup>

Here is excellent evidence that performances which cannot but have a strong historical connection with the rāslīlā of Braj today were known in the sixteenth century. The person celebrated here was not merely a singer but also a master of visual presentation through dance and possibly through some other style of physical acting as well. His performances were like those of our time in showing a primary division into rās and līlā. He was particularly famous for his performance of the great *mahotsav*, or the *Kṛishṇarāsamahotsava*, known in the terminology of the present day as the *Mahārās*. Last, we see that Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ was associated with the appearances of this dancer in some superior way, probably as supervisor, director, or patron. Jānakīprasād's account of his ancestor's promoting of the rāslīlā is confirmed in its essential point. But Nābhājī mentions rās and līlā as if they were already well-known, needing no comment or explanation. Nowhere in Nābhājī, Priyādās, Jānakīprasād, the *Bhaktakalpadruma*, or the *Bhaktamālāharibhaktiprakāśikā* is there any statement that Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ was the actual inventor of the form of dramatic art which he promoted. This claim seems to have been first advanced by Bābā Kṛishṇadās in 1949.

We know with fair certainty that the rāslīlā tradition began before the time of Ghaṇḍī and Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ. The evidence for this is in the reference to Kṛishṇa dramas in Guru Nānak's hymn, *Āsā kī Vār*, quoted above (see page 116). No matter how the place reference of this hymn is construed, it proves that the stories of Kṛishṇa were being enacted during Nānak's lifetime and within the geographical limits that are relevant to our study. We have mentioned the strong Sikh tradition that the hymn is Nānak's comment on plays which

<sup>21</sup> Nābhājī, p. 862 :

śrī brajvallabh su 'vallabh', durlabh sukh nainani diye.  
 nṛitya gāṇ guṇ nipuṇ rās meṇ ras varshāvat.  
 ab līlā lalitādi valit dampatihim rijhāvat.  
 ati udār nistār, sujas braj maṇḍal rājat.  
 mahā mahotsav karat, bahut sabhī sukh sājat.  
 śrīnārāyaṇ bhaṭṭ prabhu, param prīti ras vas kiye.  
 śrī brajvallabh vallabh, durlabh sukh nainani diye.

he had seen in Vṛindāban. The latest possible dating of this testimony is the year of Nānak's death, A.D. 1538. Even this year precedes the likely time of Ghamandī's activity and is the year of Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ's eighth birthday ! The continuum of the rāslīlā can therefore be traced back beyond these men into the early decades of the sixteenth century. We dare connect the dramas mentioned in the *Āsā kī Vār* with the modern ones, not only because of their traditional place reference but also on the basis of the general agreement of the descriptive details with the characteristics of rāslīlā. The acting was done by persons who were professional—too professional for Nānak's taste. The performances were highly emotional; they made some use of dance technique; and they gave operatic renderings of the many tales of Kṛishṇa and the gopīs.

With the reference in the Granth Sāhab, we come to the chronological limit of historical forms which can be called rāslīlā. The backward line of development is not lost here, for we shall be able to push our search into earlier centuries and find descriptions of mystery plays having an evident familial connection with the rāslīlā. But the differences of form will be great, and we shall recognize that we are studying the ancestry of the rāslīlā, not its infancy. Before venturing into that field, let us take a summary view of the rāslīlā of the early sixteenth century as seen in our small hoard of almost contemporary information.

Looking back over the testimonies of Nānak, Nābhājī, and Dhruvadās together, we are struck by the lack of any reference to svarūps, the child actors who are such a prominent feature of the modern performances. Nānak's words referring to performers strongly suggest grown persons: beggars (*maṇ-gate*) who dance, *gurus* who dance, *celās* who play instruments, and mercenary fellows (*bājārī*) who make a play for attention in the bazaars. The dancer Vallabh, celebrated in such concrete terms by Nābhājī, seems to be an adult since he is 'clever in the virtues of dance and song.' He is not a mere director of child actors, since he is praised directly for his pleasing action in the līlā, among the gopīs. Ghamandī, who bore a sannyāsī's name and was given a sannyāsī's burial, could scarcely have been a juvenile performer, and when Dhruvadās says that he performed the rās, he does not use a causative verb to indicate that he performed it indirectly through such children. We conclude that the rāslīlā of the mid-sixteenth century was still usually an adult art. As such, it was the continuation (we shall soon see) of an old traditional staging technique which was much too complicated to be mastered by children.

When did svarūps replace adult actors in the Braj tradition? We know that this practice did not come into existence very recently. Tod and Broughton found children in full possession of the stage at the beginning of the last century, and the biography of Jānakīprāsād shows that juvenile actors were the rule at the beginning of the eighteenth century as well. Might the

reputations of Ghamaṇḍī and Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ rest in part upon their having introduced the use of child actors? The *Rās Sarvasva* and the *Śrīnārāyaṇācārya Caritāmṛita* certainly show great interest in the details of the recruiting and costuming of the boys, as if their employment were a novelty, but we cannot place any firm trust in these writings because of their late date. Even Jānakī-prasād is separated from the events of which he writes by a century and a half. These authors could be projecting into the past the established practices of their relatively recent generations.

Our earliest sure evidence of Vaishṇava use of child actors comes not from the middle but from the end of the sixteenth century. It is the mention of *kīrttaniyā* by Abul Fazl, servant of the emperor Akbar at his court in and about Agra, in his encyclopedic work, '*Ain-i-Akbari*, written in A.D. 1597. In his chapter, 'On the Classes of Singers,' we read: 'The *kīrttaniyā* are Brahmans, whose instruments are such as were in use among the ancients. They dress up smooth-faced boys as women and make them perform, singing the praises of Kṛishṇa and reciting his acts.'<sup>22</sup>

Although *kīrttaniyā* is a common word in Vaishṇava literature, its occurrences elsewhere do little to enlarge our information on the profession here described. Among the Caitanyites it is a designation applicable to anyone, regardless of caste or costume, who participates in group *kīrttan*.<sup>23</sup> An old and important class of actors of Mithilā bears this name. These *kīrttaniyās* of Bihar, however, are of full age, they are not especially committed to Vaishṇava themes, and they may be drawn from any caste whatever, including harijan.<sup>24</sup> The fact that we can find other performers called *kīrttaniyā* only in eastern India may have some value as an indication of the direction from which this influence upon the *rāslīlā* came.

Abul Fazl's lonely sentences are obscure, but we can see that they speak of another strain, or at least of a new development, in the theater of the Bāl-kṛishṇa cult. The use of males in the roles of women suggests that the *kīrttaniyās*, despite their ancient instruments, developed their art in the special moral climate of the time of Muslim dominance. The use of child actors, which makes here its earliest sure appearance among Vaishṇavas, sets this tradition apart from that of our known promoters of *rāslīlā* of the middle of the sixteenth century. These *kīrttaniyās* represent a formative phase of the

<sup>22</sup> Col. H. S. Jarrett, trans. '*Ain-i-Akbari of Abulfazl-i-'Allami*, 3 (rev. ed. Calcutta, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1948), 272.

<sup>23</sup> Krishnadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya's Pilgrimages and Teachings*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar, (Calcutta, M. C. Sarkar & Sons, 1913), p. 147; cf. Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809-10* (Patna, Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928), p. 517.

<sup>24</sup> Jayakānta Mishra, 'Some Aspects of Maithili Culture,' *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, 33 (1947), 57-59; Jayakānta Mishra, *A History of Maithili Literature*, 1 (Allahabad, Tirabhukti Publications, 1949), chap. 8.



modern rāslīlā, because we see in them, for the first time, the pattern of brahman teachers and child protégés that has since become dominant in the organization of the Braj theater.

We return to the question of the direct parentage of the earliest rāslīlā known to us, as seen in the references of Nānak and Nābhājī. The only person who has done serious and extensive work on 'this problem is Daśarath Ojha, in his *Hindī Nāṭak, Udbhav aur Vikāś*.<sup>25</sup> Professor Ojhā believes that the rāslīlā arose during the Vaishṇava renaissance in imitation of medieval Jain performances called *nāṭyarāsaka*, *rāsaka*, or *rāsa*. He produces convincing evidence that certain early medieval works called *nāṭyarāsaka* or *rāsaka* were acted out in a visual manner, but he does not set forth the characteristics of these dramas in detail, nor does he compare their features closely with his incomplete information on the rāslīlā of Braj. Instead, he bases his case upon similarity of names. He assumes that these three terms refer to the same essential reality and that because Jain *nāṭyarāsaka* and *rāsaka* were sometimes acted, the Jain *rāsas* were dramas also. Then he infers, on the same principle, that there must be a close historic tie between the Jain *rāsa* and the *rāsa* of the rāslīlā. These identifications are unsound methodologically, and we must conclude that they are also erroneous factually, in view of what authorities on Jain literature say about the nature and use of *rāsas* among the Jains. Kanhaiyālāl Munshi says that the word *rāsa*, after A.D. 1200, 'came to be used for a long composition giving a sustained narrative in rhymed verse.'<sup>26</sup> M. Winternitz says of *rāsas*, 'Among the Jains, they are ballads, often with a bearing on historical personages, frequently in Old Gujarati.'<sup>27</sup> We are obliged to believe that there was no *rāsa*, enacted by the Jains of Rajasthan, which could have inspired the rise of the rāslīlā in Braj. Ojha's theory suffers another difficulty in the fact that the Vaishṇavas did not need to go to the Jains for the word *rāsa*. It is firmly rooted in their purāṇas as the name of Kṛishṇa's dance with the gopīs. The example of these cowherd-women is offered by the rāsdhārīs of today as the scriptural sanction of their profession. The gopīs of the legend not only danced the *rāsa* but also performed imitative re-enactments of many of Kṛishṇa's other deeds.

In due time we shall sift those legends for their fascinating suggestions that the Vaishṇavas possessed throughout the purāṇic period a sacramental drama imitating the events of the night of the *rāsa*. But reality will be lent to our search for ancient roots of the rāslīlā if we pass over a millennium of legend

<sup>25</sup> Ojha, pp. 78-104 and *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Kanhaiyālāl Munshi, *Gujarāt and Its Literature* (rev. ed. Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1954), p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Mrs. S. Ketkar trans. (2 vols. University of Calcutta, 1927-1933), 2, 570.



for the present and establish the fact that Mathurā cultivated Kṛishṇaite drama in the vernacular at a remote time. The question of the relation of the ancient to the modern dramas can then be faced with a due sense of its importance. To prove the existence and the extent of Kṛishṇa drama about two thousand years ago, we shall appeal to several ancient Mathurā inscriptions and to certain passages in the Harivaṃśa and in the *Mahābhāshya* of Patañjali.

The first of these pieces of evidence is provided by a tablet discovered in Mathurā in 1890. In 1892 Georg Bühler published it in *Epigraphia Indica*, along with many others, under the title 'New Jain Inscriptions from Mathurā.'<sup>28</sup> The tablet was found on the pavement of a court adjoining two ancient Jain temples. No surface feature of the slab or its inscription indicates that it was erected by Vaishṇavas. Bühler hints that the inscription might be related to Vishṇuism, but he does not pursue the matter; and by publishing it in a collection of Jain inscriptions, he concealed it from the attention of many of those who would have been most interested in it. The inscription commemorates the erection of the tablet to a *nāga* or snake deity named Dadhikarṇa. A prominent Vaishṇava historian has therefore classed it, with some propriety, among the documentary remains of the serpent cult.<sup>29</sup> By examining the text closely, however, we discover much regarding the life and religion of those who are mentioned in it. It is inscribed in the written characters of the first or second century A.D. and is worded in a mixed Sanskrit-Prakrit language of those centuries, as follows:

siddham (saṃ) [illegible] (di) 5 etasyaṃ pū(rvvāyaṃ)  
bhagavato nāgendrasya dadhikarṇasya st(a)-  
ne śīlāpaṭṭo pratishṭāpito māthurāṇ(aṃ)  
śailālakānaṃ cāndakā bhratṛikā iti vi(shṭū)-  
yamānānaṃ teshāṃ putrehi nandabalapra-  
mukhehi dārakehi mātāpitṛiṇaṃ agra-  
pratyaśatāye bhavatu sarvvasatvā(naṃ) (hita)-  
sukhā(rthaṃ) bhavatu.

Success! In the year [illegible], on the fifth, on that aforementioned (date) at the shrine of the blessed Dadhikarṇa Lord of Serpents, a stone slab was set up by the boys headed by Nandabala, the sons of those actors (*śailālakas*) of Mathurā who are being praised as the Cāndaka Brothers. May the merit of this gift be for their parents, preferably; may it be for the welfare and happiness of all beings.

Bühler says rightly that the *śailālakas* of this inscription must be regarded as the same as the *śailālins* mentioned by Patañjali in *Mahābhāshya* 4.3.110, where they are described as actors who follow the sūtras of Śīlālin. In *Mahābhāshya* 4.2.66, Patañjali says that *śailālins* are *naṭas* (... *śailālino naṭaḥ*), and in other passages he makes it clear that *naṭas* in his day were not mere

<sup>28</sup> Georg Bühler, 'New Jain Inscriptions from Mathurā,' *Epigraphia Indica*, I (1892), 371-93.

<sup>29</sup> Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishṇava Sect* (University of Calcutta, 1920), p. 99.

pantomimists but vocal performers. 'The naṭa sang' (*agāsinnaṭaḥ*), he says in 2.4.77, and in 1.4.29 he cites the expressions '*naṭasya śṛiṇoti*;' 'He hears the naṭa,' and '*raṅgam gacchanti naṭasya śroshyāmo granthikasya śroshyāma iti*,' 'They go to the theater saying, "We shall hear the naṭa, we shall hear the granthika."' We have reason to believe, therefore, that the śailālakas of our inscription were actors in the full sense, capable of enacting narrative material with voice as well as action.

What was the religion of these actors? There is no basis in the text for connecting them with Jainism, nor is the finding of the slab amid Jain ruins of any great significance when one considers its portability and the fact that it was found lying loose on a pavement to which it might easily have been carried from a non-Jain sanctuary.<sup>30</sup> Nor does the obvious fact that the actors were worshipers at a serpent shrine tell the whole about their religious allegiance. It can be shown that they were Vaishṇavas, participating in rites which were commonly observed by Vaishṇavas.

First, there is the fact, already noted by Bühler, that the serpent Dadhikarṇa, to whom the actors' sons dedicated the slab, was already assimilated into an early form of the cult of the child Kṛishṇa. Dadhikarṇa's name occurs in the Harivaṃśa in a list of righteous and beneficent nāgas invoked in a prayer which Saṃkarshaṇa himself is said to have composed and used, and which all readers of the purāṇa are urged to include in their regular ritual practice.<sup>31</sup> Second, it is to be noted that the tablet was dedicated in a month and year which can no longer be read, on a *fifth* calendar day. Now, since the time of the major purāṇas at least, the commonest day for making offerings to nāgas has been the fifth of the light fortnight of the month of Śrāvaṇa, the universal Hindu festival of Nāgapañcamī or 'Serpent Fifth.' On that day Hindu parents with their children go in family groups or in groups of families to places where cobras are known to live and offer saucers of milk and other gifts.<sup>32</sup> It is reasonable to understand this tablet to be a memento of a visit to such a place by several closely knit families of Hindu actors. In erecting a tablet to the nāga on the fifth, they were not making a gesture peculiar to some restricted serpent-worshipping sect. They were doing only what any prosperous Vaishṇava family might have done.

Proof that the actors in question actually were Vaishṇavas can be wrung from the portion of the inscription that refers to them as 'those actors of Mathurā who are being praised as the Cāndaka Brothers' (*māthurāṇ[am]*

<sup>30</sup> Bühler, *Epigraphia Indica*, 1 (1892), 380.

<sup>31</sup> Harivaṃśa, 9501-9505 (Calcutta ed.); Simon Alexandre Langlois, trans., *Harivansa*, 1 (1834), 507.

<sup>32</sup> M. M. Underhill, *The Hindu Religious Year*, p. 123; James Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship* (London, William H. Allen & Co., 1868), p. 236.

*śailālakānaṃ cāndakā bhratṛikā iti vi[śhṭū]yamānānaṃ teshāṃ*). Note that 'the Cāndaka Brothers' is not said to be their name, necessarily, in sober geneological fact. *Cāndakā bhratṛikā* is followed by *iti*; it is given in quotation marks, so to speak. It is the name under which the praise of these actors is being sung, it is what people call them—their 'stage' name. What does *Cāndaka* mean? It is a prakritization of the Sanskrit *cāndraka*, an adjective derived from the noun *candra*, 'the moon'. So *Cāndraka* means 'lunar', and our actors are being called 'The Lunar Brothers.' Why? Because they are famous for their performance of the roles of the pair who are the Lunar Brothers *par excellence*: Saṃkarshaṇa and Kṛishṇa !

Sanskritists can raise a grammatical objection: Does not *cāndakā bhratṛikā[s]* show the Sanskrit endings of the plural number, and must we not suppose therefore that the words refer to three or more brothers, not to two? No, in this mixed language the plural forms do double duty for the dual as well.<sup>33</sup> There is no grammatical reason why the words cannot refer to Kṛishṇa and his brother.

One could argue if one wished that the actors were called the Cāndaka Brothers because they were the offspring or the pupils of someone named Candra or Canda, but we know of no such person, and only if we did, would this argument have any substance. There are compelling reasons, on the other hand, for understanding 'the Cāndaka Brothers' to be an epithet for Saṃkarshaṇa and Kṛishṇa. First, Vaishṇava literature makes a great point of the lunar descent of these two. A long section of the *Harivaṃśa* traces their ancestry in detail, through Budha, Purūravas, Yadu, and others, from Soma or the moon.<sup>34</sup> Even more conclusively, in the Nānaghāṭ inscription of the first century B.C. the names of Saṃkarshaṇa and Kṛishṇa occur, accompanied by an epithet which is an easily recognizable equivalent of the term *cāndaka*. The ancient Śātavāhana queen begins her inscription on the wall of a cave in Western India with an invocation of her favorite gods. I quote the transliteration and translation of Bühler in the *Archaeological Survey of Western India* for 1883:<sup>35</sup>

(Om namo prajāpati)no Dharmaṃsa namo Īdaśa namo Saṃkarshaṇa-Vāsudevānaṃ Chamdasūtānaṃ (mahī)mā(v)atānaṃ . . .

(Om adoration) to Dharma (the Lord of created beings) ; adoration to Indra, adoration to Saṃkarshaṇa and Vāsudeva, the descendants of the Moon, (who are) endowed with majesty . . .

<sup>33</sup> Bühler, *Epigraphia Indica*, 1 (1892), 374, in his introduction to the grammar of the inscriptions.

<sup>34</sup> *Harivaṃśa* (Calcutta ed.), 1311–1968 ; Langlois, *Harivansa*, 1, 111–64. F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London, Oxford University Press, 1922), chap. 9, 'The Aila or Lunar Race.'

<sup>35</sup> Georg Bühler, *Archaeological Survey of Western India*, 5 (1883), 60 f.



The phrase 'Saṃkarshaṇa and Vāsudeva, *candasūtānaṃ*' enables us to say with confidence that the Cāndaka Brothers of the Mathurā inscription were actors in Vaiṣṇava mystery plays, famous for their portrayal of the two leading personalities of the older Kṛishṇaite mythology, Saṃkarshaṇa and his brother Vāsudeva or Kṛishṇa.

We shall press our materials for another bit of significant information. The stone slab refers to the parents of the boys as *māthurāṇ[am] śailālakānaṃ . . . tesham*, 'those actors of Mathurā.' Why this reference to their place of residence? The tablet was being erected in Mathurā, and the parents were prominent local members of a very visible profession. At best the sons would seem to be offering quite unneeded information; at worst, belittling their parents by speaking of them as if they were unknown in their own home town. Such thoughts were far from the minds of the young donors. Rather, they were using the words 'actors of Mathurā' to show that their parents were not obscure at all, but were famed far and wide. They were referring to their famous fathers as theater-goers were accustomed to speak of them. Their public evidently called them 'the actors of Mathurā.' What audiences gave them this name? Hardly the crowds of Mathurā, who would find small value in the phrase as an identification. It was in towns outside Mathurā that they were famed as the Mathurā actors who played the parts of the Lunar Brothers. Thus Mathurā was not only a scene of Kṛishṇa drama in the second century, but a center from which actors went forth.

What was the language of the dramas in which the Cāndaka Brothers performed? If 'Cāndaka' were a name which they had received at birth, we should have no hint. But 'Cāndaka' is a title given by the people, reflecting the titles used on the stage itself. If on the stage they had been known as the Cāndraka (Sanskrit) Brothers, it is not apparent why the public, and particularly the actors' status-conscious sons, should not have referred to them by that Sanskrit name. Their title occurs here in its Prakrit form because their fame was created in performances in a Prakrit tongue. A thriving tradition of Kṛishṇaite mystery drama was centered in ancient Mathurā, using the local language.

This information is confirmed and enlarged by an account of the performance of a certain troupe that is found in the Vishṇuparvan of the Harivaṃśa. In Harivaṃśa II.89 we read that Kṛishṇa on a certain occasion took the Yādavas on a pleasure trip from Dvārakā to the seashore and provided for them there many sorts of diversion. Among other arrangements, Kṛishṇa summoned from the courts of Kuvera and of Indra the most skillful apsaras. When they arrived, they entertained first the general host of Yādavas, and then at Kṛishṇa's command they performed at the retreat of Balarāma and Revatī. There, while some of them sang, others danced, and by acting (*abhinayena*) amused the



couple with a presentation of the story of their courtship. Then they dramatized a series of scenes that are worthy of special notice :

And likewise the beautiful women, laughing, auspicious of limb, performed amorously and sportively the rāsa to the rhythm of the clapping of hands, using the language, conduct, and costume of that region (7) then celebrating also on the stage auspicious things gladdening to Balarāma and Kṛishṇa : the pleasing slaying of Kāṃsa, Pralamba, and others and the killing of Cāṇura (8), and the fame spread abroad by Yaśodā, and the basis for Janārdana's name Dāmodara, and the slaying of Arishṭaka and Dhenuka, and the residing in Vraja, and the killing of Pūtana (9), and then those two shattered Arjuna trees, as well as the timely creation of the wolves, and how that evil-spirited Kāliya, lord of serpents, was subdued by Kṛishṇa in the pool (10), and the removal from Śaṅkha's pool of the blue lotuses by Madhusūdana, O hero, and how Govardhana was lifted up for the sake of the cows by Kṛishṇa Janārdana (11), and how Kṛishṇa removed the crookedness of the back of Kubjā, the maker of perfumes, and how Kṛishṇa, the eternal and flawless, yet made himself into a dwarf not small (12), and the destruction of the city of Saubha, the basis for (Balarāma's name) Halāyudha, and then the slaying of Mura the enemy of the gods, and the collecting of the powerful kings at the chariot bearing the daughter of Gandhāra (13), and then the victory in the abduction of Subhadrā and in the contest of Bālāhaka and Jambumāla, and the choice jewel which was taken before the eyes of Indra by the victorious warriors (14). The fair-formed women, O King, sang these and other pleasure-giving dance-sketches (*citrāṇi*) pleasing to Balarāma and Kṛishṇa and based upon manifold stories (15). Now the splendorous Balarāma, quite intoxicated from drinking Kadamba liquor, leaped about with his wife the daughter of King Revata, to the sweet and even rhythm of the clapping of hands (16).<sup>36</sup>

It is interesting that then, as in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, the performance of the rāsa took precedence over the other themes in the enactments. But this Harivaṃśa passage reveals a dramatic technique in which mimic dance and song were much more exclusively the media of representation. The prefatory lines of the story, dealing with the actors' opening presentation

<sup>36</sup> Harivaṃśa Purāṇa II.89.7-16, p. 375, in *Harivanshaparvan*, ed. Pandit Ramachandra-shastri Kinjawadekar (Poona, Chitrashala Press, 1936) :

cakrur hasantyaś ca tathaiva rāsaṃ taddeśabhāṣhākṛitiveshayuktāḥ  
sahastatālaṃ lalitāṃ salilāṃ varāṅganā maṅgalasambhṛitāṅgyaḥ (7)  
saṃkarshaṇādhokshajanandanāni saṃkīrtayantyo 'tha ca maṅgalāni  
kaṃsapralambādivadhaṃ ca ramyaṃ cāṇūrāghātāṃ ca tathaiva raṅge (8)  
yaśodayā ca prathitaṃ yaśo 'tha dāmodaratvaṃ ca janārdanasya  
vadhāṃ tathā 'rishṭakadhenukābhyāṃ vraje ca vāsaṃ śakunīvadhaṃ ca (9)  
tathā ca bhagnau yamalārjunau tau sṛishṭiṃ vṛikānāṃ api kālayuktām  
sa kāliyo nāgapatir hrade ca kṛishṇeṇa dāntaś ca yathā durātmā (10)  
śaṅkhahradād uddharaṇaṃ ca vīra padmotpalānāṃ madhusūdanena  
govarddhano 'rthe ca gavāṃ dhṛito 'bhūd yathā ca kṛishṇeṇa janārdaneṇa (11)  
kubjāṃ yathā gandhakapeshikāṃ ca kubjatvahināṃ kṛitavāṃś ca kṛishṇaḥ  
avāmanaṃ vāmanakaṃ ca cakre kṛishṇo yathātmānam ajo 'py anindyaḥ (12)  
saubhāpramāthaṃ ca halāyudhatvaṃ vadhāṃ muryā 'py atha devaśatroḥ  
gandhārakanyāvahane nṛipāṇāṃ rathe tathā yojanaṃ ūrjitānāṃ (13)  
tataḥ subhadrāharaṇe jayaṃ ca yuddhe ca bālāhakajambumāle  
ratnapravekaṃ ca yudhārjitair yat samāhṛitaṃ śakrasamaksham āsit (14)  
etāni cā 'nyāni ca cārurūpā jaguḥ striyaḥ prītikarāni rājan  
saṃkarshaṇādhokshajaharshaṇāni citrāṇi cā 'nekakathāśrayāni (15)  
kādambarīpānamadotkaṭas tu balaḥ pṛithuśrīḥ sa cukūrda rāmaḥ  
sahastatālaṃ madhuraṃ samaṃ ca sa bhāryayā revatārājaputryā (16)

This passage has been commented on by Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 47 f., and by Sylvain Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien*, pp. 327, 332.

before Balarāma and Revatī, say that 'the beautiful-limbed ones danced in keeping with the instrumental music, and on all sides others sang in chorus,' *vādyānurupaṃ nanṛituḥ sugātryaḥ samantato 'nyā jagire ca samyak* (śloka 5). When the troupe began to present the Kṛishṇa stories, it seems that the rhythm of the instruments was replaced or supplemented by the clapping of hands (*sahastatālaṃ*, in ślokas 7b and 16b) for governing the motions of the actors. This clapping provided the predominant sound in the performance of the rāsa and evidently in the other presentations as well, for at the close, Balarāma makes a tipsy effort to play the dancing-girl to this continuing beat. The occurrence of the similar word *tālahastāgraiḥ* in Harivaṃśa II.21.27, to be considered below, suggests that mimic dance governed by the clapping of hands may have been a special feature of the Kṛishṇaite theater. The word *jaguḥ* in śloka 15a, taken in conjunction with *nanṛituḥ* in śloka 5, tells us that there was a verbal accompaniment to the dance and that it was choral or operatic. We are not told that the dancers as well as the chorus sang, but *taddeśabhāshā . . . yuktāḥ* in 7a, referring to the performers as a body, seems to attribute utterance to all of them.

What was the language of this stage? It was *taddeśabhāshā*, 'the language of that region', not Sanskrit, which is emphatically not a regional language (*deśabhāshā*). What region's language is meant? It is the language of that region (*taddeśa*) where the just-mentioned rāsa originally occurred. Everyone knew then, as now, that Kṛishṇa had danced the rāsa in Vraja, the region of Mathurā. The Śaurasenī Prakrit of Mathurā was the language of these performances. There is no reason to suppose that Śaurasenī was subordinated to Sanskrit as in the classical *nāṭaka*. These dramatizations are not classifiable as *nāṭakas*. Only Śaurasenī is referred to, and it is likely that only Śaurasenī was used.

Where did such actors come from? They are not represented as residents of the western coast where the performances took place. They are artists on the move. They are said to have just come from a successful engagement at the courts of the gods. But from what other place shall apsaras be said to come? Daring to take this tale as springing from a literary mind informed by knowledge of actors of earth rather than of heaven, we shall say that the author was familiar with actors of Mathurā who traveled far and wide and that troupes from Mathurā, sixteen hundred years ago, could be conceived as wandering as far as Gujarat.

It is apparent in our handling of śloka 12 above that we claim to have discovered the technical name of the anecdotal units of this dance drama: They were called *citra*. Readers of Sanskrit will have been startled to see there the unconventional translation 'dance sketch', which cannot be defended by the authority of any dictionary. *Citra* is a common word, of well-established

meanings, and a person who would add another to the register must justify his innovation. We shall attempt to show that the obvious utility of the rendering 'dance sketch' here is supported by uses of the word *citra* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*.

An entire chapter entitled *Citrābhinayādhyāya* is found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Chapter 26 in the Kāvya-mālā edition). The Kāśī Sanskrit Series edition introduces the subject in the last line of Chapter 25 with the remark *ata ūrdhvam pravakśyāmi citrasyābhinayam prati*, 'Hereafter I shall tell about the miming of the citra.'<sup>37</sup> The *Citrābhinaya* chapter itself begins with a scholastic distinction between *citra* and all forms of abhinaya mentioned before: 'What the special features are of miming with the limbs, etc., has been explained *passim*; the yet unmentioned is called *citra*, it is known as *citrābhinaya*.'<sup>38</sup> The exact meaning of this distinction has remained obscure to commentators, ancient and modern, but the chapter which follows explains massively, by its very content, what a citra was, as understood by the authority who wrote it. As seen in this chapter, a citra is an elementary unit of gestural representation which conveys to the viewer the impression of one particular object, being, abstract idea, or single phase of an episode. For example, instructions are given for communicating by gesture the ideas of morning, evening, day, night, the seasons, moonlight, sun, smoke, sharp objects, lightning, shooting stars, mountains, oceans, repugnant objects, lions and other animals, emotions, the greeting of gods and superior persons, and the representing on the stage of various kinds of death and of the various stages of death. The type of miming is called *citra*, we would judge, because it conveys meaning by the direct pictorial effect of pose and gesture. Used in narrative, it would express only a limited development. The function of a citra would be the presentation of a fundamental moment in the progression of the story.

The scenes danced before Balarāma and Revatī can be placed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s category of citra with reasonable ease. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes citras as simple and brief presentations, no doubt, but they are not tableaux;

<sup>37</sup> Bātuk Nāth Sharma and Baldeva Upādhyaya, eds., *Nāṭyaśāstram* (Banāras, Kāśī Sanskrit Series, No. 60, 1929), p. 298.

<sup>38</sup> Pandit Śivadatta and K. P. Parab, eds., *The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata Muni* (Bombay, Kāvya-mālā, No. 42, 1894), XXV.1, p. 282:

anṅādyabhinayasyaiva yo viśeṣaḥ kvacitkvacit  
anukta ucyaṭe citraḥ sa citrābhinayaḥ smṛitaḥ.

Only here *citra* occurs in the masculine, cf. the neuter of the Harivaṃśa. In view of the corrupt nature of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* text we do not think this difference important. Apparently *citrābhinaya* is discussed in the style of this chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the manual *Nartan-nirṇaya* by the sixteenth-century Kṛishṇaite writer Puṇḍarika Viṭṭhala, (see Rajendralal Mitra, *Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts*, 8 (1886), No. 2580, pp. 31–33), and in Bihar near the Orissan border there survives today a dance-drama having the episodic structure in question. Balwant Gargi says of it (*Folk Theater of India*, p. 175), 'The chhau program is a variegated string of small dance-dramas, each lasting seven to ten minutes.'



simple narrative development is sometimes involved. The twenty-odd episodes included in the Harivaṃśa performance tell more elaborate stories than the author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* seems to have in mind, but each was necessarily handled briefly: so many were included within a single performance that the time devoted to each could not have been great, even if one assumes a very long sitting. Each of the Harivaṃśa's citras had a simplicity which justifies its being understood as an instance of the dance form mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* lends to our word *citrāṇi* not only definiteness of meaning but also assured historicity: the form citra described elsewhere as a performance of superhuman beings is revealed here as belonging also to the arts of the human theater.

The word *citra* occurs also, about three hundred years earlier, in a passage in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* which supports the view that a citra can be a dance sketch used in representing Vaishṇava myths. In his commentary on Pāṇini III.1.26, Patañjali refers to the manner in which śaubhikas, citras, and granthikas present Vaishṇava stories. Since all three of these names involve possible substantiations of the existence of Kṛishṇa drama in the second century B.C., a further quest of the meaning of *citra* cannot be separated from the effort to probe the full breadth and antiquity of the theater of the Kṛishṇa cult. Because the passage is extremely difficult and has been wrangled over without agreement by scholars of the first rank, it will be necessary to produce the entire text and to discuss it fully.

The artists mentioned are named by the grammarian in an illustration of the logical correctness of the use of the present tense of a verb with the suffix *-aya-* when narrating events of the past. The art of the śaubhikas, he says, is a presentation in which the deeds of long ago become present realities again. In the critical edition of Kielhorn the passage reads:

Iha tu katham vartamānakālatā kamsam ghātayati baliṃ bandhayatīti cirahate kamsa cirabaddhe ca balau. atrāpi yuktā. katham. ye tāvad ete śobhanikā nāmaite pratyakṣam kamsam ghātayanti pratyakṣam ca baliṃ bandhayantīti. citreshu katham. citreshv apy udgūrṇā nipatitāś ca prahārā dṛśyante kamsakarṣaṇyaś ca. granthikeshu katham yatra śabdagaḍumātram lakshyate. te 'pi hi teshām utpattiprabhṛity ā vināśād ṛiddhī vyācakṣhāṇāḥ sato buddhivishayān prakāśayanti. ātaś ca sato vyāmiśrā hi dṛśyante. kecit kamsabhaktā bhavanti kecid vāsudevabhaktāḥ. varṇānyatvam khalv api pushyanti. kecid raktamukhā bhavanti kecid kālamukhāḥ. traikālyam khalv api loke lakshyate. gaccha hanyate kamsaḥ. gaccha ghānishyate kamsaḥ. kim gatena hataḥ kamsa iti.<sup>39</sup>

Kielhorn's appendix on variant readings has convinced us that his choices were sound. We have rejected, therefore, the suggestions of various scholars that other readings be substituted for *śabdagaḍumātram* and *ṛiddhī*, and that

<sup>39</sup> F. Kielhorn, ed., *The Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya of Patanjali* (2nd rev. ed. Bombay, Government Central Book Depot, 1892–1906), 2, pt. 2, p. 36. For the grammatical context, see Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, 'Allusions to Krishna in Patanjali's *Mahābhāṣya*,' *Indian Antiquary*, 3 (1874), 14–16.



the order of *raktamukhā* and *kālamukhāḥ* be reversed. In place of the name *śobhanika* of Kielhorn's text, however, we shall use in our discussion the well-based variant *śaubhika*, merely because it has become the conventional term in the extensive secondary literature on the passage.

It is an act of bravado to offer an immediate translation of these lines, which have become a celebrated puzzle in the history of Indian literature. We offer a working translation now, to enable patient non-Sanskritists to follow our discussion of their import. For illuminating and sobering conferences on the meaning of the passage the author thanks Professor Stanley Insler, Professor K. V. Abhyankar, and Ācārya V. P. Limaye. The punctuation of Kielhorn's text can of course be questioned, but we shall not do so initially. As far as practical, a noncommittal rendering will be given which preserves the ambiguities of the text at hotly debated points, and we shall retain in the translation a few Sanskrit words on the meaning of which there is no agreement. We read:

But how the present tense in the case of 'kaṁsaṁ ghātayati, balim bandhayati', Kāṁsa having been slain long ago, and Bali having been bound long ago? Here also it is correct. How? First, those persons called *śobhanikas* relate the slaying of a visible Kāṁsa and relate the binding of a visible Bali, they say. In the case of the *citras*. How? Right there in the *citras* the upraised and fallen blows are seen, and the women dragging Kāṁsa to and fro. In the case of the *granthikas*, how, where only the *gaḍu* of words is perceived? Reciting the fortunes of these from birth to death, they surely cause to appear real beings belonging to the sphere of the mind—real beings indeed, because factions are seen. Some become adherents of Kāṁsa, some adherents of Vāsudeva. They even display differences of color. Some become red of face, some black of face. And the triad of tenses is perceived even among the people: 'Come on, Kāṁsa is being killed!' 'Come on, Kāṁsa is going to be killed!' 'What's the use of coming? Kāṁsa has been killed.'

The interpretation of this passage must be faced without the aid of any Sanskrit commentary that is worthy of being regarded as primary evidence. The line of commentators goes back from Nāgojī Bhaṭṭa of the eighteenth century, through Helarājā, to Kaiyaṭa and Haradatta, the authors of the oldest extant comments on this portion of the text. S. N. Dasgupta says, perhaps too precisely, that Haradatta died in A.D. 878.<sup>40</sup> Haradatta had no sources older than Bhartṛihari's seventh-century *Mahābhāshyadīpikā*, which has survived only in a fragment covering the first fifty-six sūtras. It is from this relatively late work that the entire commentarial tradition begins. Bhartṛihari himself tells us in his *Vākyapadīya*<sup>41</sup> that the eight hundred years between Patañjali and himself involved an almost complete breakdown in transmission. He says that Patañjali's disciples allowed his teaching to fall into decay until only one copy of the *Mahābhāshya* remained in the South. A grammarian named Candra obtained the text there and caused copies of it to be distributed

<sup>40</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta and Sushil Kumar De, *A History of Sanskrit Literature, Classical Period, I* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1947), 528.

<sup>41</sup> Bhartṛihari, *Vākyapadīya* (Banāras, Benares Sanskrit Series, 1877), pp. 284–86, verses 487–90.

about, and in this way the *Mahābhāshya* became known to Bhartṛihari's own teacher. Thus, there is little reason to hope that the commentators beginning with Bhartṛihari preserve an original body of explanatory information coming from the age of the *Mahābhāshya* itself. Their explanations are suggestive, not authoritative. They have been worked over and used by modern writers—sometimes in the mistaken position of definitive proofs!

Modern bibliography begins with the thirteenth volume of Albrecht Weber's *Indische Studien*, published in 1873.<sup>42</sup> Weber saw in the passage a reference to three separate techniques for the vivid presentation of past events. He believed that the śaubbhikas were actors, who enacted the Vaishṇava tales bodily with full theatrical technique. The known history of the Indian drama begins with these Kṛishṇaite performers. In his opinion the citras were paintings in which the incidents in Vaishṇava legend were pictured. The granthikas were rhapsodists who declaimed the narrative after distributing the various recitative roles. Before the end of the nineteenth century, the material had been analysed with similar results by Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, and by Sylvain Lévi in *Le Théâtre indien*.<sup>43</sup> Weber's school of interpretation reached its fullest development in the writings of Arthur Berriedale Keith. Professor Keith began to write on the subject in 1908, contested rival interpretations for many years, and offered his final argument in his book, *The Sanskrit Drama*, published in 1924.<sup>44</sup> Keith's positions will be described later.

Keith's early controversies were with nonindologists whose speculative arguments do not have to be remembered, but in 1916 Professor Heinrich Lüders confronted the Weber-Keith viewpoint with its first serious denial and set forth his distinctive shadow-play theory regarding the śaubbhikas. Lüders' article, 'Die Śaubbhikas', was republished with several important additional notes in *Philologica Indica*, a compendium of his writings. This substantial essay is still the most thorough survey of the literary evidence relevant to the problem.<sup>45</sup>

The third phase of development in the literature consists of two telling critiques published in the journal of the German Oriental Society, in which

<sup>42</sup> Albrecht Weber, *Indische Studien*, 13, 354 f., 487–96.

<sup>43</sup> Bhandarkar, *Indian Antiquary*, 3 (1874), 14–16; Lévi, *Le Théâtre indien*, pp. 314 f.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Berriedale Keith, 'The Child Kṛṣṇa,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1908), pp. 169–95; Arthur Berriedale Keith, 'The Origin of the Indian Drama,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 61 (1910), 534 f.; Arthur Berriedale Keith, 'The Vedic Akhyana and the Indian Drama,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1911), pp. 979–1109; Arthur Berriedale Keith, 'The Origin of Tragedy and the Akhyana,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1912), pp. 411–38; Arthur Berriedale Keith, 'The Čaubbhikas and the Indian Drama,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, I, pt. 4 (1920), 27–32; Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 31–36.

<sup>45</sup> Heinrich Lüders, 'Die Śaubbhikas,' *Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 33 (1916), 698–737; reprinted with additional notes in his *Philologica Indica* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1940), pp. 391–428, 788.

Lüders' shadow-play theory was effectively destroyed. In 1918 in his review article, 'Zur Geschichte des indischen Dramas', Alfred Hillebrandt proposed that the śaubbhikas were trainers of actors<sup>46</sup>; and M. Winternitz in 1920 in his 'Kṛṣṇa-dramen' arrived at the considered opinion that in all the *Mahābhāṣya* passage's register of arts there is no reference to drama at all.<sup>47</sup> Winternitz concludes that this text, properly understood, proves only that there were literary forms of Vaishṇava myth in the second century B.C. and that they were recited publicly by two distinct types of narrators. One type, the *granthikas*, used books; the other used pictures (*citras*). 'Thus falls the possibility of any appeal to the *Mahābhāṣya* for the beginnings of the Indian drama,' says Winternitz, 'Neither can one quote Patañjali to show that the Indian drama arose from the Kṛishṇa cult.'

For forty years no one ventured to revive debate on the meaning of this passage. The exhausting of easily available evidence on the matter, the telling blows that had fallen on the heads of all who had claimed to see drama in these lines, and the force and authority of Winternitz' magisterial pronouncement—all this combined to discourage any serious reopening of the question. The fact that we have discovered actors actually performing Kṛishṇaite dramas in Mathurā as long ago as the second century A.D. gives us courage to revive discussion of the earlier activities of the śaubbhikas and the *granthikas*. Lüders launched his famous shadow-play interpretation on the basis of data of much weaker chronological relevance.

The scholars mentioned above have tended to seek the meaning of Patañjali by isolating the key terms of the passage—*śaubbhika*, *citra* and *granthika*—and striving for a definition of each. We shall at first follow them in that piecemeal approach, noting their varying positions on the meaning of each term.

We shall take up first, the question of the nature of the *granthikas*' art because it can be settled with great certainty at the essential point. The *granthikas* were reciters of established literary forms of Vaishṇava legend, but they did not mime their tales, and their activities as described in this passage provide no proof that Vaishṇava mystery plays existed in the time of Patañjali. On this, all writers have agreed, beginning with the commentator Kaiyaṭa, who equated them with *kathakas* (see p. 52 and notes, above). This consensus is based upon Patañjali's own clear description of their activity, of their medium of expression, and of the effect of their work on their audiences. The heroes presented by the *granthikas* are set in clear contrast with the *Kaṃsa* of the

<sup>46</sup> Alfred Hillebrandt, 'Zur Geschichte des indischen Dramas,' *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 72 (1918), 227–32.

<sup>47</sup> M. Winternitz, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 118–25.



śaubhikas and the citras, who is *visible*. The spoken word is the characteristic instrument of the granthikas. In the term *śabdagaḍumātram*, which describes their technique, the obscure *-gaḍu-* could in theory refer to a second non-verbal medium of expression, but not to visual representation, for the reason just mentioned. The granthikas are described as *reciting* artists (*vyācakshānāḥ*). The characters whom they create are said to have their reality in the realm of the mind (*buddhivishayān*). The granthikas were not actors.

Confusion is created in the periphery of this simple picture, however, by Patañjali's puzzling statement about the appearance of factions in the course of the granthikas' performances: 'Some become adherents of Kāṃsa, some adherents of Vāsudeva. Some become red of face, some black of face.' What body of persons is it which splits into factions? the granthikas, or their hearers? Do Kāṃsa's adherents show the blackness of face, and Vāsudeva's the red color, or vice versa? What do the colors mean? These questions have been argued heatedly and at length.

In Keith's view it was the granthikas themselves who divided into two groups for the sake of carrying out distinctive declamatory roles. Some, who were to recite for the forces of Kāṃsa, painted their faces black, while the representatives of the partisans of Vāsudeva colored their faces red. Keith combines this analysis with a speculative theory that the dark-faced Kāṃsa who was slain represented the darkness of winter and that Kṛishṇa, red-faced, represented the conquering power of summer, light and vegetation. To hold that the colors were thus used, Keith had to ignore the well-considered order of the words *raktamukhā* and *kālamukhāḥ* in Kielhorn's critical text and revert to the order found uniquely in the Banāras edition used by Weber many years before. His color-symbolism was generally criticized on textual grounds, and deserved ridicule on geographical grounds. The spirit of winter darkness who gives way to the vegetation spirit makes sense in Edinburgh, but not in Banāras.

Lüders introduced a new solution to the problem of the factions: It was not the granthikas but the persons of the audience who took sides as the recitation reached its climax, some of them siding with Kāṃsa, and some with Kṛishṇa. Hearing the story and visualizing the frightful conflict, the adherents of Kāṃsa turned red with rage, whereas the followers of Vāsudeva turned black with fear. Lüders claimed that established use of the word *varṇa*, occurring in *varṇānyatvam* of the text, will not allow a reference to stage paint, but only to natural facial coloration.<sup>48</sup> Therefore the contrasting tints mentioned in the text must be understood as the natural products of varying emotions in the audience. Winternitz joined Lüders in holding that the color distinction must be attributed to the audience, but held that Indian color conventions

<sup>48</sup> Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, pp. 418 f.



would require that the black faces be those of the adherents of Kāṃsa. Alfred Hillebrandt returned to Keith's view that it was the *granthikas* who manifested a division into factions. Attributing the division to the audience would require the supposition of an antecedent other than *granthika* for the pronoun in the clause 'Some (*kecit*) become adherents of Kāṃsa.' This cannot be allowed on grammatical grounds, said Hillebrandt. Also, a siding with the detested Kāṃsa by any part of an Indian audience is inconceivable.

The searcher for early Vaishṇava drama need not be more than marginally involved in these debates about the performance of the *granthikas*. Whether it was Kṛishṇa's or Kāṃsa's faction which was black or red of face is not a vital matter. No valid reason has been seen for altering the order of words in Kielhorn's text, which makes Kṛishṇa's faction black and Kāṃsa's red. But the cosmetic conventions of the Indian stage can provide excellent authority for either color arrangement.<sup>49</sup> Lüders notwithstanding, the word *varṇa* can in good usage be employed to refer to stage paint since *varṇa* is used in that sense in Yājñavalkya 3.161.<sup>50</sup> On the question of the nature of the factional division, therefore, the use of this word does not compel us to see the differentiation in color as occurring in the faces of the audience. We prefer the view of Keith and Hillebrandt that the *granthikas* themselves underwent this division. The telling positive arguments are the grammatical and cultural considerations raised by Hillebrandt. It bears repeating that, in the light of what we know of the Kṛishṇa cult, it is all but incredible that any portion of any Indian audience ever flushed red with anger because of Kṛishṇa's threat to Kāṃsa's life. In the portion of the *Harivaṃśa* just rendered we heard of the enacting of 'the *pleasing* slaying of Kāṃsa, Pralamba and others'. Red rage at the prospect of the killing of Kāṃsa is actually ruled out by the last lines of our *Mahābhāshya* passage itself, in which the general public looks forward eagerly to this happy killing as the crowning attraction of the performance. If the *granthikas* divided into groups for the sake of reciting their story in two parts, and if they emphasized the differentiation of roles by contrasting facial paints, as we believe, then their declamations had a dramatic quality based upon minimal impersonation and choral dialogue. Even so, we have made no important discovery. The visual characteristics of the *granthikas*'

<sup>49</sup> Kṛishṇa's faction may be black-faced because that is Kṛishṇa's natural complexion traditionally; or because Kṛishṇa is Nārāyaṇa [*The Nāṭyaśāstra*, trans. Manmohan Ghosh (Calcutta, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Bibliotheca Indica, No. 272), 23 : 87, p. 423; Kashi Sanskrit Series 23 : 92; Kāvya-mālā edition, 21 : 76], or a Śūrasena, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bibliotheca Indica edition, 23 : 101. Kāṃsa may be red because he manifests the *raudra* or wrathful *rasa*, or because he is a king (23 : 94) or a *kshatriya* (23 : 102). If with Keith we insist on reversing the colors, we can find justification in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, chap. 23 (Kāvya-mālā edition, chap. 21) for that cosmetic practice as well.

<sup>50</sup> A. F. Stenzler ed., *Yajñavalkya's Gesetzbuch* (Berlin, Dümmler, 1849), p. 107, 3 : 161, *yathā hi bhārato varṇair varṇayaty ātmanastanum*, 'as an actor paints his body with colors.'

performance were superficial at best. It was not through the eye but through the ear that they caused the Vaishṇava heroes to become 'real beings' in the minds of those assembled. Their presentation was not in itself a drama. Only the possibility that the *granthikas* may have had an auxiliary function in a complex group of performers, others of whom occupied the center of the stage and performed the visible actions, leads us to ask the reader to hold them in mind for future consideration. We pass on to the problem of the meaning of *śaubbhika* and *citra*.

The word *citra* has aroused little controversy. The substantial agreement on its fundamental meaning that has prevailed among scholars has been based on their common acceptance of its conventional definition as a painting, picture, or sketch. Albrecht Weber and his school saw these paintings as the second in a series of three analogous arts—two of them visual and the third audile—none of which had any necessary connection with the other in actual use. Lüders introduced the idea, based on grammatical considerations, that the pictures had to be the visual base for accompanying narrations of the slaying of Kāṃsa and the binding of Bali. Hillebrandt called these presumed narrators *Bildersänger*, who displayed the paintings while telling their stories in ballad. Lüders believed that a profession could be indicated like that of the *maṅkhas*, *gaurīputrakas*, and *yamapaṭikas*, known in Sanskrit literature, who displayed pictures and commented on them; but he preferred the idea that the reciters were the *śaubbhikas*, departing from their normal recitative work at the shadow theater to provide the narrative commentary at displays of these paintings as well. Winternitz carried this supposition further, holding that the narrative explication of such *citras* was the *śaubbhikas*' normal professional work. Because the interpretation of the word *citra* runs immediately into prior questions regarding the meaning of *śaubbhika*, it is not worth while to elaborate and criticize these points of view at the present moment.

Modern scholarship's original understanding of the word *śaubbhika* was developed to its full potentiality by Arthur Berriedale Keith. Keith understood the *śaubbhikas* to be performers who set the slaying of Kāṃsa and the binding of Bali before the eyes of spectators in some form of corporeal acting which was at least pantomimic in nature. It is not impossible that the *śaubbhikas* spoke dialogue, said Keith, but we are sure only that they represented Kāṃsa and Bali with their visible bodies. It is difficult to call them 'actors', because the players of the full Indian drama in its well-known classical form were never called *śaubbhikas*. Keith draws no connection between *śaubbhikas* and *citras*. But the *śaubbhikas*' performance may have been correlated, he believed, with the activities of the *granthikas*. He noted that the *śaubbhikas*, whose presentation was visual, had a potentially complementary relation with the *granthikas*, whose performance was surely audile. The two essential

components of full drama were therefore already in existence in Patañjali's time. Then or later, they must have been brought together. The history of Indian drama begins with this passage.

Lüders destroyed the certainties of this picture. He produced evidence that the action which Patañjali affirms of the śaubbikas is not a visible enacting of the slaying of Kaṃsa, etc., but a different kind of rendering of these themes. The basis of his criticism of Keith is a new understanding of what the verbs *ghātayati* and *bandhayati* must mean according to Patañjali's grammar. Weber had already noticed Patañjali's statement in commenting on Pāṇini 3.1.25 that *kaṃsaṃ ghātayati* is equivalent to *kaṃsavadham ācashṭe*, 'he narrates the killing of Kaṃsa'.<sup>51</sup> This principle must be applied to the verbs in *-aya-* in this passage, said Lüders; they must be understood to refer directly and literally to acts of verbal narration.<sup>52</sup> *Kaṃsaṃ ghātayati* cannot mean 'He causes Kaṃsa to be killed' in some visual re-enactment which, in a figurative sense, 'tells' the story. It must mean, 'He narrates the killing of Kaṃsa.' The śaubbikas were therefore narrators. Their narrations were accompanied, of course, by some sort of visible representing of Kaṃsa. Up to this point in his argument Lüders was to carry with him his two successors in this debate, Hillebrandt and Winternitz. He was to stand alone when he offered his positive theory regarding the nature of the accompanying display. The Indian art which combines narration with visible action, said Lüders, is that of the shadow-players, who recite legends to accompany the movements of translucent leather figures manipulated behind an illumined screen.<sup>53</sup> The śaubbikas were shadow-players. Professor Lüders made an industrious effort to prove that shadow theater has existed in India and to trace it back to the age of the *Mahābhāshya*.

Lüders understood the interpretation of *citra* to be subject to the same grammatical necessity. The fragmentary sentence, '*citreshu katham?*', must be completed by assuming a repetition of a subject and verb from the preceding lines, reading, then, 'In what respect (is the present tense, *kaṃsaṃ ghātayati*, correct, when the story of the slaying of Kaṃsa is narrated) with pictures?' The assumed verb, *ghātayati*, requires that the *citras* be accompanied by a reciter; the pictures cannot themselves 'narrate' the slaying of Kaṃsa. Patañjali does not identify the narrators whom he has in mind. Lüders preferred the notion that the śaubbikas, as a sideline, sometimes recited explanatory narrative for displays of paintings.

<sup>51</sup> Weber, p. 354.

<sup>52</sup> Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, pp. 413 f.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 441 f. Full documentation of this discussion will now be discontinued, since the writings (already listed) are generally short.



Hillebrandt pointed out that a Kaṃsa who is a shadow on a screen is too insubstantial to be called a *pratyakṣaṃ kaṃsaṃ*. In rejecting Lüders' shadow-play theory, he also pointed out the lack of support for it among the Sanskrit commentators on the *Mahābhāṣya* and the relative modernity of all of Lüders' evidence for the existence of shadow plays. Agreeing that the śaubbhikas were necessarily narrators, Hillebrandt placed his reliance on the commentator Haradatta, who defined *śaubbhika* as *kaṃsaghātānukāriṇām naṭānām vyākhyānopādhyāyas*—literally, 'the explanation-teachers of the actors imitating the slaying of Kaṃsa'. Hillebrandt held that the śaubbhikas were, specifically, directors of plays. They taught actors the recitation of their parts, interpreted the play to them, and at the beginning of the public performance intimated to the audience the theme of the coming play, performing the function of a *sthāpaka* or *sūtradhāra*. Hillebrandt assumes, then, that Patañjali knew a fairly sophisticated theater which was handling Vaishṇava themes in the second century B.C.

When Winternitz entered the discussion, he joined his immediate predecessors in denying that the śaubbhikas were any kind of actors. Then, with Hillebrandt, he dismissed Lüders' shadow-play theory as well. Then he himself destroyed in turn Hillebrandt's claim that a śaubbhika is a director who introduces performances after the manner of a sūtradhāra. Not in any of his functions, whether as explanation-teacher or as previewer of the coming play, would such a śaubbhika be a narrator of things which stand before the eyes (*pratyakṣa*). Winternitz' positive interpretation of *śaubbhika* emerged from his pondering of the words *citra* and *granthika*. In the case of the word *granthika* we have the name of a class of reciters who recited from books (*granthas*). On the other hand, in the word *śaubbhika* we have the name of a class of reciters without mention of their accessories, and in the case of the term *citra* (which Winternitz understood to mean 'picture') we have the name of an accessory to recitation without the name of the reciter who uses it. Reciter and accessory should be brought together. We may assume that the citras were a medium used by the śaubbhikas. The śaubbhikas in their narrations kill a Kaṃsa and bind a Bali who are visible in the pictures they are concurrently showing. Thus Winternitz makes into a strong bond a connection which Lüders had proposed only marginally. In his overall interpretation of the passage, Winternitz understands Patañjali to be illustrating his point by mentioning two independent arts, not three: (1) that of the śaubbhikas, who narrate the Vaishṇava stories with the display of pictures, and (2) that of the *granthikas*, who recite the tales from books, depending upon words alone.

Beginning our own critical approach, we judge that Winternitz was quite successful in his attack on the position of Hillebrandt. What kind of teacher a *vyākhyānopādhyaya* might have been cannot be known exactly, but when



Hillebrandt makes him a sūtradhāra, then Winternitz objects justly that such a śāubhika does not fill the requirements of our text. We add that the very late commentary of Haradatta has no authority that would compel us to accept its definition in spite of difficulties. Lüders' shadow-play theory must be rejected also on the sound complaints of Winternitz and Hillebrandt. Because of its glaring chronological fallacies, it deserved more scornful judgment than it got. The earliest shadow-players Lüders was able to discover belonged to a period a full millennium later than Patañjali. Lüders, in the republication of his essay, was at last able to quote from Indian literature one plain statement that śāubhikas are shadow-players. A commentary on the *Nītivākyaṃṛita* of Somadevasūri of the tenth century A.D., said to have been written by Somadevasūri himself, defines *śāubhika* (which occurs in the text in a list of professions suitable for employment as spies), as 'a displayer of forms of various sorts at night by means of a cloth screen'.<sup>54</sup> The statement is not negligible. But if such recent evidence is to be honored, we must prefer the direct statement of Haradatta, written even earlier and in direct elucidation of this very passage, that śāubhikas are teachers of actors who dramatize the killing of Kaṃsa. That reference to the full-blown theater takes precedence over Somadevasūri's testimony on all counts. But we cannot trust even Haradatta to have known the truth.

There would be little difficulty with regard to the meaning of the verbs *ghāṭayati* and *bandhayati*, if they had occurred in any book but the *Mahābhāshya*. In any other setting they could be taken as simple causatives and would bear interpretation as referring to the stage representations of actors. Keith, who believes that actors are involved, is able to quote the commentators Nāgojī Bhaṭṭa and Haradatta in a free understanding of the passage, according to which a painter tells the story through his pictures; in that case an actor could also 'narrate' the killing of Kaṃsa by enacting it.<sup>55</sup> But the question is not what these classical Sanskrit verbs *usually* mean, but what Patañjali in this particular passage intended them to mean; and in an immediately preceding passage he has said that *kaṃsaṃ ghāṭayati* means 'he narrates the killing of Kaṃsa'. We feel obliged for the present to accept this statement at its face value and to believe with Lüders, Hillebrandt, and Winternitz that narration is the only work which Patañjali specifically attributes to the śāubhikas. We are forced to keep to this position even though an important new article has

<sup>54</sup> Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, pp. 788, 427 n. He quotes a commentary (without publication details) said to have been written 'von Somadeva selbst', on *Nītivākyaṃṛita* 55: *kṣapāyām kāṇḍapaṭāvaraṇena nānāvidhanāmarūpadarśi*. These words can be found, with glosses, in an undated edition published by Gopālanārāyaṇa Press, Bombay, in its commentary on *Nītivākyaṃṛita* XIV.8.

<sup>55</sup> Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 34; and in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 1, pt. 4, p. 28.

appeared in which K. M. Varma reinterprets Patañjali's extended and complex arguments radically and offers release from the restriction laid down by Lüders.<sup>56</sup> The present writer cannot now come to a decision on Varma's central point and must proceed on the older and more limiting presuppositions. We shall continue to presume, then, that the śaubbhikas are proved to be narrators, but not more, and that if we are to believe that they also performed the physical impersonation mentioned in the passage, the evidence will have to come from some other source, and it will have to refer to a style of acting which can be carried on harmoniously with concurrent narration.

A small fund of information about śaubbhikas can be gathered together from sources outside the *Mahābhāṣya*. We shall now sift this meager data for any indication that their activities extended beyond storytelling into truly theatrical realms and for any test of Winternitz' theory that the śaubbhikas were displays and narrators of mythological paintings. A handful of literary references will be considered first. Lüders collected most of the clearly valid instances of the word (without exploiting all of them fully) and a number of occurrences of *sombhā*, *sobhiya*, and *sobhanagarakam*, of dubious relevance, which we shall ignore. The word *śaubbhika* or its sure variants has been found in Somadevasūri's *Nītivākyāmṛita* as mentioned, in Rājāśekhara's *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, in the *Mahāvastu*, and (three times, in the form *saubbhika*) in the *Arthaśāstra*.<sup>57</sup> In every case the name is found in a list of professions, without definition and usually without elaboration or comment. Even the barest listing provides

<sup>56</sup> K. M. Varma, 'The Art Medium of the Saubbhikas and Its Nature,' *Asiatische Studien* (Berne), 15 (1962), 95–109. Varma re-examines the entire setting of our passage in Patañjali's grammatical thought and rejects Lüders' claim that the verbs *ghāṭayati*, etc., express an act of narration only. He says (pp. 98 f.) that Patañjali offers the definition *kāṃsavādham ācaṣṭe* only provisionally, and later rejects it. Varma's own understanding of the meaning which Patañjali attaches to verbs in *-aya-* is 'to fit (something) into one's intention' (p. 104 and *passim*): The śaubbhikas in their theater manipulate the citras in such a way that their artistic design is realized. If we can agree with Varma in this, then the existence of a Vaiṣṇava theater will be demonstrated, because the śaubbhikas will have to be key stage personnel whether we insist on our own interpretation of *citra* and *śaubbhika* or grant Varma's understanding of them as painted puppets and puppeteers. Varma joins Winternitz—rightly, we believe—in sensing that the citras must be the medium of expression of the śaubbhikas. But his positive interpretation of *citra* and *śaubbhika* has a very feeble base, resting entirely as it does upon the reference to *sucittitā sombhā* in Therīgāthā 390, which was fundamental to Lüders also. Varma supposes that, because this remotely related word *sombhā* clearly refers to puppets, *śaubbhika* should be translated 'puppeteer'. This argument is as convincing to us as the reasoning that 'puppeteer' must mean 'kennelkeeper', because of the clear meaning of the word 'puppy'. Varma is somehow convinced that the mystery of Patañjali's word *citra* is unlocked by *sucittitā*, but his logic is not expressed nor is it self-evident. The aspect of Varma's article which demands unhurried examination is his new understanding of Patañjali's interpretation of the suffix *-aya-*. This is a task for specialists in Patañjali's grammar.

<sup>57</sup> R. P. Kangle, ed., *The Kautiliya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay, University of Bombay Studies, Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali, No. 1, 1960), I, 2.27.25, 7.17.34, and 11.1.34. É. Senart, ed., *Le Mahāvastu*, 3 (Paris, Société Asiatique, 1897), 113, line 3; Rājāśekhara, *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā*, ed. C. D. Dalal and R. Anantakrishna Shastri (Baroda, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. I, 1916), p. 58.

assurance, of course, that the śaubbhika profession existed and was generally known; and the livelihoods which are named in close association with the śaubbhikas yield an inkling about the general nature of their work.

When one places these six lists side by side one learns at once that śaubbhikas were entertainers. The broad category in which the ancient writers always included them has a preponderance of dancers, singers, instrumentalists, speakers, rope-dancers, mimics, bards, wrestlers, acrobats, clowns and the like. All six of the lists include *naṭa* and *nartaka*. Five include the names *gāyaka* or *gāyanaka* or *gāyana*. Four include *vādaka* and *vāgjīvana*. Arthaśāstra 7.17.34 lists śaubbhikas among performers who, by gaining access to an enemy king's palace, shall provide opportunity for hostages to escape disguised as members of their group. Rājāśekhara mentions them in the same breath with courtesans (*gaṇikā*) and their managers: *tataḥ paraṃ bhujaṅga-gaṇikā plavakaśaubbhikajambhakamallah*. Arthaśāstra 2.27.25 underscores this connection with the *gaṇikā* by dealing with the śaubbhikas in its chapter on the superintendents of public women, and by prescribing that the rules governing *gaṇikās* shall apply to the women of the śaubbhikas also. In Arthaśāstra 11.1.34, śaubbhikas are named among the show people who shall sow quarrels among the ruling chiefs of the enemy by stirring up rivalries over the charms of beautiful young women.

These bits of information affect the plausibility of the two theories we are testing. The material of the Arthaśāstra, which has a strong chronological relevance, undermines Winternitz' theory that śaubbhikas were reciting picture-showmen. It is not easy to see how such a showman with his scroll or easel would be effective in stirring up quarrels over beautiful women or how his equipment and small entourage could provide good cover for hostages escaping from a palace or why his wife should be an object of concern for the superintendent of courtesans. The prominence of *naṭa*, *nartaka*, *gāyaka*, *vāgjīvana*, and the like in our lists encourages us to believe that the śaubbhikas were known for dancing and singing rather than for picture displays—with recitation and the playing of musical instruments as good additional possibilities. We are much interested to learn from the Arthaśāstra that the śaubbhikas, who are named only in the masculine gender in the *Mahābhāshya*, had women in their group also<sup>58</sup> and that these women had professional functions to perform, including the public display of their beauty. Winternitz' conception is condemned as too narrow by this information, which encourages us to revive, in a chastened form which accommodates Lüders' insights, the old hypothesis that the śaubbhikas performed mimetically.

<sup>58</sup> . . . *naṭanartakagāyanavādakavāgjīvanakuśilavaplavakasaubbhikacāraṇām strīvyavahariṇām striyo gūḍhājīvāśca*, in Arthaśāstra, 2.27.25.



We shall strengthen our interpretation by examining next a quite old Mathurā inscription in which the name *śaubhika* occurs. In it the profession is connected once again with the well-known *gaṇikā*, and also—very important for our purposes—with the city of Mathurā. The inscription is cut in an engraved tablet, No. Q. 2 in the Mathurā Museum, which has been dated by Krishṇadatt Vājpeyī, on epigraphical grounds, at about the first century B.C. The text, and translation with one bracketed addition, are reproduced here from Vāsudev Śaraṇ Agrawāl's catalogue.<sup>59</sup>

Namo Ārahato Vardhamānasa Ārāye gaṇikā-  
ye Loṇaśobhikāye dhitu śamaṇasāvikāye  
Nādāye gaṇikāye Vasu(ye) Ārahāto devik(u)la  
āyāga-sabhā prapā śil(ā)pa(to) patisth(ā)pito Niganthā-  
nām Araha(tā)yatane sa(hā) m(ā)tare bhaginiye dhitaras putreṇa  
sarvena cha parijanena Arahata pujāye.

Adoration to the Arhat Vardhamāna. The daughter of the matron (?) courtesan Loṇaśobhikā (Skr. Lavaṇaśobhikā), the disciple of the ascetics, the junior (?) courtesan Vasu has erected a shrine of the Arhat, a hall of homage (āyāgasabhā), a cistern (and) a stone slab at the sanctuary of the Nirgrantha Arhats, together with her mother, [her sister], her daughter, her son and her whole household, in honour of the Arhats.

Serious study of this inscription began in 1904 with an article by Lüders in the *Indian Antiquary*.<sup>60</sup> The transcription which he used rendered the name of principal interest as Leṇaśobhikā. Lüders translated it 'the adorning of caves'. A little later in the same year, in his article 'Indische Höhlen als Vergnügungs-orte,'<sup>61</sup> he revised the translation to 'cave-actress' (*Höhlenschauspielerin*) and identified her as a member of the *śaubhika* profession mentioned in *Mahābhāshya* 3.1.26. The new rendering was an improvement. Since the matron in question was a *gaṇikā* and since *gaṇikās* have traditionally practiced dancing and other types of corporeal showmanship concurrently with prostitution in a natural relation, she is much more likely to have acted in caves than to have decorated them. But Professor Lüders worked intently, during the next dozen years, on the problem of the identity of the *śaubhikas*, and came to his well-known conclusion that they were shadow-players. Now, Indian courtesans are not known to have produced shadow plays, nor is such a retiring and self-effacing work at all likely as an auxiliary activity for a courtesan. That this *gaṇikā* was really a *śaubhika* by profession necessarily became unlikely in the eyes of one who was already firmly committed to the view that *śaubhikas* were shadow-players. Further scrutiny of the inscription by Lüders and others

<sup>59</sup> Vāsudev Śaraṇ Agrawāl, 'Catalogue of the Mathura Museum,' *Journal of the Uttar Pradesh Historical Society*, 23, parts 1-2 (1950), pp. 69 f. Additional description, discussion and bibliography is found in J. Ph. Vogel, *Catalogue of the Archaeological Museum at Mathura* (Allahabad, Government Press, 1910), pp. 184 f.; and in his *La Sculpture de Mathura* (Paris, Ars Asiatica, XV, 1930), pl. Vb and p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Heinrich Lüders, 'Epigraphical Notes', *Indian Antiquary*, 33 (1904), 152 f.

<sup>61</sup> Heinrich Lüders, 'Indische Höhlen als Vergnügungsorte', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 58 (1904), 868.



revealed that the correct reading of the first element of the name is *Loṇa-* not *Leṇa-*. Lüders thereupon retracted not only 'cave-', the first element of his translation, but also his interpretation of *-śobhikā* as 'actress'. He declared that *Loṇaśobhikā* is a purely personal name, having no professional significance and no connection with the profession mentioned by Patañjali.<sup>62</sup>

It is true that *Loṇaśobhikā* must be taken as a whole and that the whole is to be understood as the appellation of an individual. The replacement of *Leṇa-* with *Loṇa-* ('graceful, charming') enables us to make excellent sense of the combination. Though the use of the Sanskrit form *Lavaṇa* alone as a personal name is certified by its occurrence in a Mathurā inscription,<sup>63</sup> we would presumably have *Loṇā-* here if the compound were to be read 'Lavaṇā the Śaubhikā', after the manner of the name Bhavanandin the Cloakmaker, mentioned in another Mathurā inscription.<sup>64</sup> The cloakmaker's name does show, however, that professional titles were acceptable in Mathurā as part of the public designations of persons. Why *Loṇaśobhikā* should have no professional significance here is hard to understand. To ignore that interpretation of *-śobhikā* is to set aside all we have learned from the collection of all known occurrences. One moves from the references to the śaubhika women in the *Arthasāstra* to the gaṇikā *Loṇaśobhikā* of this inscription with a strong sense of continuity of meaning. If with Lüders we abandon this solid footing to speculate on the word etymologically, we get no rendering more sensible than 'Graceful Adorner' or 'Adorner of the Salt Sea' ! This woman of Mathurā must be identified as Graceful Śaubhikā of the śaubhika profession.

Now we return to Winternitz' understanding of śaubhikas as narrators of stories made visible in citras, which he takes to mean paintings. We have not questioned that śaubhikas are narrators. Also, the strong reasoning whereby Winternitz established the connection between the narrating śaubhikas and their accessories, the citras, still stands. But we have concluded that the citras cannot be paintings.

In translating *citra* can we employ, then, our new-found meaning, 'dance-sketches'? We have learned that the śaubhikas included personnel who are normally capable of dancing. There were in their group women considered by the world to be a type of gaṇikā, who are well-known for that skill. The matron of the inscription we have just considered acknowledges in her titles that she is both a śaubhikā and a gaṇikā (*gaṇikāye Loṇaśobhikāye*, above). Is there any evidence of the presence of such women in Patañjali's words on the citras? At first it seems not: '*citreshv apy udgūrṇā nipatitāś ca prahārā dṛiśyante*

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, p. 422.

<sup>63</sup> Heinrich Lüders, *Mathura Inscriptions*, ed. Klaus L. Jänert (Göttingen, Abhandlungen der Wissenschaft zu Göttingen, philosophische-historische Klasse, No. 47, 1961), pp. 166 f.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169. The donor of the inscription calls himself Bhavanandī-prāvarikaputra.

*kaṃsakarshanyaś ca.*' Nor are the lines rich enough in descriptive details to reveal whether any of the staging techniques of the citras mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Harivaṃśa* are present here. The main mythological theme dealt with in these citras of the *Mahābhāshya*—the slaying of Kāṃsa—is of course among those named also in *Harivaṃśa* II.89.8. One can point out that the three glimpses mentioned—the raised blows, the fallen blows, and the dragging of Kāṃsa—have a pictorial quality which is characteristic of citras, and that, taken individually or even together, they by no means exceed the scope of citras as explained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The conclusive evidence, however, is the phrase *kaṃsakarshanyaś ca*, which worried Lüders, who remained in doubt regarding both the translation and the reading.<sup>65</sup> Lüders did well in not attempting to substitute any of the textual variants. The commonest of these—*kaṃsasya vāsudevasya ca*, *kaṃsasya ca vāsudevasya ca*, and *kaṃsasya ca kṛishṇasya ca*—are only evasive substitutions for a troublesome reading. Another, *kaṃsavarshanyaś ca*, has the same grammatic difficulties as Kielhorn's reading, makes less sense, and has a poorer base since it occurs in one manuscript only. We are stuck with *kaṃsakarshanyas*. But if we resolutely translate the grammatical form that we see, and then take the consequences, it provides its own solution: *-karshanyas* has the form of a nominative plural *feminine* (-ī) of the adjective *karshaṇa* used substantively; so our sentence reads, 'In the citras the upraised and fallen blows are seen, and the women dragging Kāṃsa to and fro.' What women are these? In the legend itself Kāṃsa is pulled down and dragged about by Kṛishṇa and Balarāma, not by women. If the citras mentioned in this passage were paintings, as has always been held, then Kṛishṇa himself, on the canvas, would be seen dragging Kāṃsa, and the feminine ending could not be used. But if the citras in which these events were seen were dance-sketches performed by the usual personnel, then the onlooker would see *women* dragging Kāṃsa to and fro. We think it evident by this time that the citras here are not the work of painters, but of the women of the śaumbhikas, and here in *Mahābhāshya* 3.1.26 also, we can translate 'in the dance-sketches'. And we read, 'those persons called śaumbhikas relate the slaying of a visible Kāṃsa and relate the binding of a visible Bali—i.e. in dance-sketches. How? In the dance-sketches the upraised and fallen blows are seen, and the women dragging Kāṃsa to and fro.'

We believe that the sense of the passage has been improved by this partial integration of its terms. Is it possible that the remaining line of division—that between *citreshu* and *granthikeshu*—should likewise be bridged? There is a grammatical pressure in that direction, since *granthikeshu* occurs in a construction that is parallel to the already-subordinated *citreshu*. Also because of

<sup>65</sup> Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, p. 413 ; variant readings, p. 408, and in Kielhorn, ed., 2, 409.

the known quality of Patañjali's thought, one ought to look for a single frame of reference for the entire passage. Lüders says of him as thinker and writer, 'A Patañjali is often reserved in his mode of address, but always hair-sharp.'<sup>66</sup> This being true, we should not be sure that we have grasped all of Patañjali's meaning. Even with our recent revision of the translation, we must admit that the Patañjali we present is lax in his logical organization and rambling in his style as he subjoins additional examples and adds descriptive details about them as they occur to him. Therefore we think it worthwhile to introduce a bit of evidence regarding the *granthikas* which indicates that they may have been mentioned immediately after the *citras* because they had an intimate connection with them on the stage.

It has been overlooked that the word *granthika* occurs in the *Mahābhāshya*, not only in the commentary on 3.1.26, but also on 1.4.29, where one can glean some valuable information regarding the place and the company in which a *granthika* commonly performed. The sūtra 1.4.29, *ākhyātopayoge*, stands in a series that deals with the various situations in which the ablative case is prescribed. This sūtra says that the ablative ending is to be added to a noun when 'acquisition of what is related' is to be expressed. Patañjali then takes up the objection that, in an accepted usage having to do with learning from the recitations of *granthikas* and *naṭas*, the genitive not the ablative case of those nouns is actually used. He quotes his imaginary critic thus:

Upayoga iti kimartham. naṭasya śṛinoti. granthikasya śṛinoti. upayoga ity ucyamāne 'py atra prāpnoti. esho 'pi hy upayogaḥ. ātaś co 'payogo yad ārambhakā raṅgaṃ gacchanti naṭasya śroshyāmo granthikasya śroshyāma iti.<sup>67</sup>

Why say (the *ablative* should be used) when there is acquisition (of what is related)? (For one says) he listens to the *naṭa*, he listens to the *granthika* (genitive case!). Here also, with regard to what is being uttered, (the rule of) 'when there is acquisition (of what is related)' applies. This surely *is* acquisition (of what is related), because those who are starting out go to the theater (*raṅga*) saying, 'We shall listen to the *naṭa*, we shall listen to the *granthika* (genitive case).'

Patañjali then goes on to explain that the rule requiring use of the ablative is not really tested by usages related to such learning as this but that it applies only to the higher instruction in texts and their meaning which one obtains from a teacher.

Our interest focuses first upon the information given quite incidentally that a *granthika* normally practiced his art in a *raṅga*. A *raṅga* is a place of public assembly, commonly used for the presentation of all sorts of shows. The *raṅga* in this passage is that sort of public gathering place, because people are setting out to go to it. In its more particular sense, *raṅga* means 'stage' or 'theater'.

<sup>66</sup> Lüders, *Philologica Indica*, p. 411.

<sup>67</sup> Kielhorn, ed., I, 329.



According to Harivaṃśa II.89.8, it was in a raṅga that the apsarases performed the *Kaṃsavadha* and other pleasing citras.

More important still, we learn that a granthika does not perform alone. He performs here in co-ordination with a naṭa. Twice in this passage, listening to a naṭa is mentioned in the same breath with listening to the granthika. In the first occurrence one could take the connection as only a logical one, but the second reference necessarily brings them together in the same time and place of performance. One sets out for the raṅga with the intention of hearing both of them. The language does not suggest the loose billing of unrelated artists found in the program of a variety show. The utterances of the two of them together provide the knowledge which one acquires. All that we know about the early meaning of the word *naṭa* suggests a type of performance easily co-ordinated with the recitations of the granthikas, and essentially complimentary to them. Since we are dealing with a relatively early literary text, we shall not translate naṭa as 'actor' but as 'dancer', for dance was surely fundamental in the art of the naṭas of the preclassical stage. But the naṭa of this passage is not merely a dancer, for we read, 'he *listens* to the naṭa . . . we shall listen to the naṭa.' What might one hear from a naṭa? Song, at least: *agāsīn naṭaḥ*, 'The naṭa sang', says *Mahābhāṣya* 2.4.77. A naṭa was a dancer and singer, and as such was a practitioner of an art somewhat different from and potentially supportive to that of the reciting (*vyācakshānāḥ*) granthikas. A granthika could be a member of a dance-drama team, whereby his recited narratives were elaborated upon, vocally and visibly, by a dancer. Since we know that a citra is a dance sketch, we are within bounds when we surmise that Patañjali in his words, '*citreshu katham . . . granthikeshu katham*', is referring to a well-known theatrical combination in which naṭas contributed dance and song, and the granthikas their distinctive text recitations.

But if we link the granthikas in this way with the women who danced the citras, we must accept along with them their male associates, the śaubbhikas. We will, then, have a complex group of performers headed by a śaubbhika or śaubbhikas. Patañjali can open his reference to them by using the word śaubbhika and then mention immediately without further explanation the citras and the granthikas—names which refer to well-known specialized functions carried on by members of the śaubbhika troupes. In that case it is not three arts, or two, but only one complex Vaishṇava dance drama which Patañjali had in mind.

In support of this unitive understanding, we ask a rereading of the passage from *Mahābhāṣya* 3.1.26, noticing the many indications of unity of theme and time and place in the presentations which Patañjali had in mind. Both citras and granthikas are seen and heard in a central public arena or stage. The śaubbhikas, mentioned everywhere as show people, can be expected to operate in such a setting. The citizens can be envisioned as flocking to the



raṅga to see and hear a consortium of artists. The last lines of both our passages have a single situation in view: An alert public outside the theater is pouring toward it, or planning to come, or discussing the point to which the acting has progressed and debating the advisability of coming. Unity of theme is as prominent as the unity of place. At the first general mention of the performers we are told 'They relate the killing of Kāṃsa . . .' The śāubhikas tell of the death of a visible Kāṃsa. In the citras one sees the blows which kill Kāṃsa. The granthikas narrate Kāṃsa's destruction (*vināśa*). The people outside the theater all want to be sure to be in it when the slaying of Kāṃsa actually takes place. Looking at all this material as a piece of composition, we must call it, in Western terms, a paragraph. If we allow our imagination to respond to it naturally, it does not occur to us to see here anything other than continuing references to a single festal scene: A crowd is gathered about a place of performance in which these Vaishṇava stories are being presented in an extended climactic series, such as is now familiar to us, by these several artists who work not in isolation but together.

We believe this unitive interpretation to be more satisfactory than the older ones. We confess that it involves difficulties. If the granthikas recite in support of dancers who are visible on the stage at the time, are the heroes of their recitations realities of the mind (*buddhivishayān*) as contrasted with visual realities? The line of difference becomes artificial and hard to maintain. Circumstances can be imagined which would support the distinction, of course: The svarūps of the Rāmlīlā often lapse into relative quiescence while the paṇḍits recite. Then, there is the difficulty in conceiving the relation between the scriptural or quasi-scriptural narrative recitation of the granthikas and the utterances of the male śāubhikas, who also narrate. We can conceive a harmonization by supposing that the śāubhikas contributed nonconflicting narrative material in a supplementary language, or, like the svāmīs of the rāsmaṇḍalīs (above, pp. 152 f. and note 33), material having a special function and literary form. But we cannot demonstrate from our evidence the historical reality of such a compatible arrangement, so a problem remains. Additional difficulties and alternative solutions may be perceived by those exceptional scholars who are expert in Patañjali's grammatical thought, general habits of mind, and customary idiom. This integral interpretation is offered for their comment.

What have we been able to show conclusively in our discussion of Patañjali? We believe that we have been able to show that Kṛishṇaite mystery plays of the kind described in the Harivaṃśa were already in existence in the second century B.C. This conclusion could stand if necessary upon the revelations of the word citra alone. But a strong web of evidence connects the śāubhikas and granthikas with drama. Our bringing together of śāubhika, citra and

granthika in the activity of a single śaubbhika troupe creates a picture that is not clear in its details, and can be rejected. Even if it is rejected, the evidence for the early existence of Vaishṇava dance dramas is not thereby critically reduced.

The early chapters of this book teach the lesson again and again that literature not written with the serious purpose of describing an exotic drama cannot be pieced together into a reliable descriptive picture of it. Allowing for our inability to grasp the whole truth regarding the dramas mentioned in these various ancient sources, it is still possible to perceive that the Vaishṇava theater even in this very early stage in its history existed in a variety of forms. When we compare the stage activities of the Cāndaka brothers mentioned above with the ballet performances referred to in the Harivaṃśa and the *Mahābhāshya*, it is clear that different techniques and types of organization are involved. In the latter dramas *women* were seen on the stage in the roles of the Vaishṇava heroes, but in the performances of the Cāndaka brothers it was adult men, the fathers of responsible sons, who were famed in those roles. We cannot go further in comparing stage methods, but we can perceive a vast difference in the structure of the social groups to which Loṇaśobhikā and the Cāndaka brothers belonged. Loṇaśobhikā is the head of a fatherless courtesan family in which the senior woman has dominance and in which descent is counted in the female line only. Her daughter Vasu mentions neither her father (though it was conventional to do so in Mathurā inscriptions) nor the father of her children, and she mentions her daughter before her son. The brothers and cousins who erected the stone slab to Dadhikarṇa, on the other hand, belonged to a tight patriarchal family. Their fathers, the actors, bore the special name *śailālaka*. In the form *śailālin* we know this name in Pāṇini 4.3.110 f. as the distinctive designation of one of the two great traditional divisions of the naṭas, alongside the *Kṛiśāśvins*. Since the śaubbhikas were in several respects very different from these śailālakas, they *may* have been representatives of the Kṛiśāśvins.

Our search for the earliest traces of Kṛishṇaite mystery drama has taken us back to ancient Mathurā and to the age of our first substantial information on the Kṛishṇa cult itself, the second century B.C. From its first great blooming, then, Kṛishṇaism used the stage for the propagation of its sacred histories. This is the most probable period for the composition of the Bhagavadgītā. In it we do not find any reference to drama, it is true, but knowledge of Kṛishṇa's deeds is stressed, and there are general allusions to social means for becoming acquainted with the holy saga. In Bhagavadgītā 4:5 ff., Kṛishṇa says that he has been born many times and that the person who truly knows his wondrous births and actions is not reborn but comes to him. Knowing Kṛishṇa's acts is of ultimate importance then as a means of salvation itself. In Bhagavadgītā 10:8 ff. we learn that enlightened men of the true spirit find contentment

and joy 'enlightening one another and telling about Me constantly' (*bodhayantaḥ parasparam kathayantaś ca mām nityam*). The recitative dance drama, which was already in use, may have been among the customs here suggested whereby the devout told Kṛishṇa's story.

Our many evidences of drama among the Vaishṇavas indicate the existence of a strong sectarian theater and a possibility that fondness for the stage was a special Vaishṇava characteristic. We do not claim, however, that the types of drama that we have been studying were instruments peculiar to them. It would be surprising if Loṇaśobhikā, whose daughter built edifices for Jain monks, limited her performances to Vaishṇava themes. The age and extent of dance drama among other ancient religious groups remains an open question.<sup>68</sup>

Now we must face the problem of the many centuries which lie between the ancient Mathurā dramas just revealed and the rāsdhārīs of the sixteenth century, whose tradition we have been trying to trace. A millennium is too long a time to assume the continuity of human institutions—even in India. The rāsdhārīs of Braj can claim the Cāndaka brothers and the *danseuse* of the citras as predecessors in their own tradition only if the survival of those ancient arts during the following thousand years and more is demonstrated. With this need in view we shall examine now the accounts in the major Vaishṇava purāṇas of how the gopīs on the night of the rāsa—that legendary night that is so important to the modern rāsdhārīs in the sanctification of their enterprise—imitated the deeds of Kṛishṇa after the manner of actors. The Harivaṃśa, Viṣṇu and Bhāgavata Purāṇas give successive versions of the story which are progressively more ample.

The oldest form of the story, in Harivaṃśa II.21, says that on a certain full-moon night of autumn the cowherd maidens followed Kṛishṇa wherever he went and expressed their adoration by singing and mimicking his acts:

Then all those daughters of the cowherds, formed in groups,  
Made merry, singing in pairs the charming acts of Kṛishṇa, (25)  
Imitating Kṛishṇa's līlā, with Kṛishṇa's gait and manner,  
Those tender beauties with glances fixed upon Kṛishṇa. (26)  
In the woods, to the clapping of hands, making a humming sound,  
Other Braj women performed the deeds of that Kṛishṇa (27)  
And those joyful Braj women played, imitating  
His dance, song, sport, smile and glance. (28)<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> The Jains at an ancient time enacted the life of Mahāvīra in dance. The proof is to be seen in the *Rājaprasānīya* or *Rāyappasenīya* (Bombay, Agamodaya Samity, 1925), sūtra 24, p. 53b. Malayagiri's commentary is found on pp. 55a-b. This work is the second *upāṅga* of the Śvetāmbara Jain canon which was fixed in the fourth century A.D. In a catalogue of dance types listed there, the thirty-second and final kind of dance is one in which male and female performers enacted Mahāvīra's career. The dancers presented Mahāvīra's previous lives, his foetal miracles, birth, childhood, sexual exploits, renunciation, asceticism, searchings, insight, preaching and final *nirvāṇa*. The anecdotal treatment in dance is noteworthy in view of our discussion of the word *citra*. We have taken note of medieval Jain dance dramas above, pp. 113-14 and p. 232.

<sup>69</sup> Gopāla Nārāyaṇa, ed., *Harivaṃśa* (Bombay, Dala Press, 1895), II.21.25-28 :



Some kind of representational activity is being referred to here, but the manner of acting is not precisely described. If an earthly practice is reflected in the myth, we cannot identify it as professional theater rather than, for instance, mimetic folk ballad. The performing of the deeds of Kṛishṇa 'to the clapping of hands' (*tālahastāgraiḥ*, verse 27) is a characteristic of the citras of Hari-vaṁśa II.89 (cf. *sahastatālam*, verses 7 and 16), and the citras already at this time were an art form of the real theater. But we shall not, on the slender basis of this word alone, insist that the author already knows a theater which claims the sanction of the example of the gopīs. And there is no need to strain the resources of this particular text to prove the existence of professional Kṛishṇaite drama, for that demonstration has already been made from other materials.

We move on to the slightly later version of Vishṇu Purāṇa V.13:

And when Kṛishṇa had gone to another place, the gopīs, with their own form of Kṛishṇa's action.

Moved about in groups within Vṛindāban. (24)

Their hearts preoccupied with Kṛishṇa, they said this to one another :

'I am Kṛishṇa,' says one, 'I move gracefully ; see my gait !'

Another says, 'Hear my singing of Kṛishṇa's song !' (25)

Another, slapping her arms in defiance, said, 'Vile Kāliya !

Halt there ! I am Kṛishṇa !' and undertook the whole of Kṛishṇa's līlās. (26)

Another says, 'Herdsmen, be settled securely !

Enough of fear of rain now ! Govardhana is upheld by me !' (27)

'This Dhenuka has been slain by me. Let the cows graze at will,'

Says another gopī who is imitating Kṛishṇa's sports. (28)

Thus did those gopīs, intent on the various kinds of actions of Kṛishṇa,

Perform the equivalent of them then in the Vṛindāban wood. (29)<sup>70</sup>

tās tu pañktikṛitās sarvā ramayanti manoramam  
gāyantyāḥ kṛishṇacaritaṁ dvandvaśo gopakanyakāḥ. (25)

kṛishṇalīlānukāriṇyāḥ kṛishṇapraṇihitekshaṇāḥ  
kṛishṇasya gatigāminyas taruṇyas tā varāṅgaṇāḥ. (26)

vaneshu tālahastāgraiḥ kūjayantyas tathā 'parāḥ.  
cerur vai caritaṁ tasya kṛishṇasya vrajayoshitaḥ. (27)

tās tasya nṛityaṁ gītaṁ ca vilāsasmitavīkshitaṁ  
muditās cā 'nukurvantyāḥ krīḍanti vrajayoshitaḥ. (28)

<sup>70</sup> Jivānanda Vidyāsāgara, ed., *Vishṇu Purāṇa* (Calcutta, Sarasvatī Press, 1882), pp. 668 f., V.13.24 ff. :

gopyaś ca vṛindaśaḥ kṛishṇaceshṭāsvāyattamūrttayāḥ  
anyadeśaṁ gate kṛishṇe cerur vṛindāvanāntaram. (24)

kṛishṇe niruddhahṛidayā idam ūcuḥ paraspāram  
kṛishṇo 'ham etal lalitam vrajāmy ālokyatām gatiḥ  
anya bravīti kṛishṇasya mama gītir niśāmyatām. (25)

dushṭa kāliya ! tiṣṭhātra kṛishṇo 'ham iti cā 'parā  
vāhum āspoṣṭya kṛishṇasya līlāsarvasvam ādāde. (26)

anyā bravīti bho gopā ! niḥśaṅkaiḥ sthīyatām iha  
alaṁ vṛiṣṭībhayenā 'tra dhṛito govardhano mayā. (27)

dhenuko 'yam mayā kshipto vicarantu yathe 'cchayā  
gopi bravīti vai cā 'nyā kṛishṇalīlānukāriṇī. (28)

evam nānāprakārāsu kṛishṇaceshṭāsu tās tadā  
gopyo vyagrāḥ samaṁ cerur amyāṁ vṛindāvanaṁ vanam. (29)



A comparison of these lines with those of the *Harivaṃśa* reveals at the outset a prominent innovation: The performances are not done in Kṛishṇa's company, but in his absence: *anyadeśam gate kṛishṇe* (v. 24b). Further, the general statements that the gopīs imitated Kṛishṇa's sports are not merely repeated but stressed and spelled out in concrete details. Dialogues are put in the mouths of the gopīs. Several of the divine acts that were imitated are named specifically: the defeat of Kāliya, the raising of Mount Govardhana and the slaying of Dhenuka. It is suggested that such actions were many (29a) and that all were fit subjects for acting (26b).

When we turn to the still later *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X.29–30, we find a much expanded story, which we shall have to present in summary, for the most part. Most of the general statements and named episodes are repeated from the earlier documents, but in addition, in X.30.15–23, we are given brief but vivid sketches of how the gopīs enacted Kṛishṇa's playing of the flute, his punishment for theft, his overcoming of the forest fire, and his slaying of the demons Pūtānā, Śakaṭa, Trīṇāvarta, Vatsa and Baka. The *Vishṇu Purāṇa*'s placing of the acting in a time of separation from Kṛishṇa is accepted and developed at length. We are told the cause of Kṛishṇa's departure: Flattered by Kṛishṇa's attentions, the gopīs begin to think themselves the most beautiful women in the world. To humble their pride, he vanishes. They wander long, calling out for him among the trees. During a pause in this search the enactments are performed—an effort to remain mindful and faithful in the absence of the beloved god:

Speaking frantically thus, despairing in their search for Kṛishṇa,  
The gopīs imitated various sports of the Lord, at one with Him in spirit (X.30.14)<sup>71</sup>

The three accounts just surveyed are laced together by substantial repetition of words and concepts. For instance, mention of Kṛishṇa's gait (*gati*) and the mimicking of it echoes through all three: *kṛishṇasya gatigāminyas* (*Harivaṃśa*, II.21.26); *kṛishṇo 'ham etal lalitam vrajāmy ālokyatām gatiḥ* (*Vishṇu Purāṇa*, V.13.25); *kṛishṇo 'ham paśyata gatiṃ lalitām iti . . .* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, X.30.19b). The newer texts were written by persons who knew and used the older. The three documents, each one dealing more amply with the incident, express three stages of thinking within a tradition that has a certain unity.

<sup>71</sup> *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Madras, V. Rāmaswamy Sastrulu and Sons, 1937), vol. II, p. 1365, X.30.14:

ityunmattavaco gopyaḥ kṛishṇānvешaṇakātārāḥ  
līlā bhagavatas tās tā hy anucakrus tadātmikāḥ.

It is hardly necessary to reproduce the entire text. The story can be surveyed in the literal translation of M. N. Dutt, *Srimadbhagavatam* (Calcutta, 1896–97), or in the free but fair translation of Radhakamal Mukerjee in *The Lord of the Autumn Moons* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1957), pp. 97–127.

While developing the Harivaṃśa's story, the newer purāṇas follow a common line in deepening two tendencies: the placing of the plays in a time of separation and the extending of the list of episodes which the gopīs are said to have enacted.

What caused the literary development to move on these particular lines? The random working of the ever-creative human imagination could be credited, but the drive to elaborate upon one's heritage is usually controlled and directed by deep human interests. In this particular case the interests could well be those of actors and audiences who were involved in the promotion of a continuing tradition of Kṛishṇaite mystery plays. The Vaishṇava playgoer, bringing into the theater his persistent problem of separation from the deity, would welcome and promote the growth of this legend which expressed his awareness of bereftness and at the same time lent sacredness to plays that provided a partial remedy by making the deity a present reality in his mind. Actors would gain confidence in their own limited art by realizing that the revered gopīs, too, on that first night of the rāsa, did not have Kṛishṇa in their midst. Actors would welcome, above all, the inclusion in the sanctifying legend, by name, of as many items of their own repertory as possible. The purāṇic passages do not describe their theater because description was not their function. Their function was to provide religious explanation and transcendental sanction for a living theater. This is their importance even in the present day, as a matter of fact, for the rāsdhārīs of Braj.

This effort to trace a line of living drama through the age of the purāṇas is plausible enough, but its findings remain suppositionary without substantiating historical evidence. For this reason we are glad to learn in Bhāgavata Purāṇa XI.11.23 f. that the acting of Kṛishṇa's deeds was not, at the time of the purāṇa's composition, limited to legendary persons and places. The acting of dramas on these themes is recommended as a devout practice for Kṛishṇa devotees who are currently on earth, in these terms:

A believer, hearing the auspicious world-purifying tales of Me,  
Chanting and surely remembering them, *constantly enacting My birth and deeds*,  
Undertaking duty, wealth, and enjoyment for My sake, with Me as refuge,  
Obtains unshakable devotion for Me, the Eternal, O Uddhava!<sup>72</sup>

'Enacting My birth and deeds' is not likely to refer to participating in Sanskrit dramas, because there is very little indication that Sanskrit dramas on Kṛishṇa themes existed until after the time of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Excepting the

<sup>72</sup> Bhāgavata Purāṇa XI.11.23 f., vol. II, pp. 1806 f. :

śraddhāḥ me kathāḥ śṛṇvan subhadra lokapāvanīḥ  
gāyan nanu smaran karma janma cā 'bhinayan muhuḥ  
madarthe dharmakāmārtān ācaran madupāśrayaḥ  
labhate niścalāṃ bhaktim mayy uddhava sanātane.

very dubious case of the *Bālacarita* attributed to Bhāsa,<sup>73</sup> Kṛishṇa plays are lacking in Indian dramatic literature until the appearance of the *Gopālakelicandrikā* of Rāmakṛishṇa, written in Gujarat for an audience of Kṛishṇa devotees, which is later than the Bhāgavata because it quotes from it. As a Sanskrit nāṭaka, the *Gopālakelicandrikā* is quite irregular in its lack of Prakrit, in its rhymed lyrics which must have been sung, and in its narrative inserts in prose and verse which must have been uttered by someone other than the actors. Both Willem Caland, the first modern editor of this play, and M. Winternitz, who has studied it in detail, believe that it may reflect the influence of a Kṛishṇaite folk drama.<sup>74</sup> An isolated drama, it does not establish the existence of a type of nāṭaka to which the Bhāgavata might refer. On the contrary, it joins the Bhāgavata in pointing toward an unknown tradition of enacting the entire life of Kṛishṇa in a regional language.

The latest and last of the references which we shall use to connect the age of the Harivaṃśa with the sixteenth century is a description of a Kṛishṇaite saṃgīta that is found in the *Nārada Pañcarātra*.<sup>75</sup> The mature Rādhā theology of this work (e.g. in II.6.6 ff.) shows it to be much later than the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and its doctrinal teaching in general dissociates it from the ancient and true pañcarātra saṃhitās and relates it to the North Indian sampradāyas. Its translator in the Sacred Books of the Hindus series even estimates (too precisely) that it was written 'a short time before Vallabha, that is, about the beginning of the sixteenth century'.<sup>76</sup> At any rate it testifies to art forms which prevailed just before the earliest rāslīlā that we know from Hindī literature.

Beginning with the eleventh adhyāya of the first rātra, we read of how the Gandharva Upavarhaṇa came to the court of the god Brahmā at Pushkara and staged there, with the assistance of groups of apsaras and vidyādhārīs, a performance called the saṃgīta of the *Kṛishṇarāsamahotsava*. Numerous unexplained proper nouns and technical musical terms indicate that the writer was referring to a highly developed art with which his North Indian readers could be presumed to be familiar. The first eight verses are as follows:

<sup>73</sup> For bibliography and survey of the question, see De in S. N. Dasgupta and S. K. De, *Sanskrit Literature*, I, 102–15.

<sup>74</sup> Willem Caland, 'Een onbekend Indisch Tooneelstuk (Gopālakelicandrikā). Tekst met inleiding door W. Caland', *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Academie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam*, Afdeling Letterkunde, N. R. deel XVII, No. 3 (Feb. 1917), 4 f.; M. Winternitz, 'Kṛṣṇa-dramen', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 137–44.

<sup>75</sup> Rev. K. M. Banerjea, ed., *The Nārada Pañcha Rātra* (Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, XXXVIII, 1865), I.11.1 to I.12.7, pp. 76–81.

<sup>76</sup> Swami Vijnanananda, trans., *Sri Narada Pancharatram—The Jnanamrita Sara Samhita* (Allahabad, Sacred Books of the Hindus, XXIII, 1921), p. ii.



Then the king of the gandharvas, at the god's command,  
Sang there the saṁgīta of the great festival of Kṛishṇa's rāsa.  
The splendid measure, the melodious sweet tune  
Sound of the vīṇā, mṛidaṅga and tambourine,  
The agreeable sweetness provided by the rāgas with their rāgiṇīs  
Melodious and pleasing to the mind,  
The varied splendor of the dance (*nṛityarucira*),  
The universally pleasing theme and the hand positions of the mimic dance  
(*nāṭyopayuktahastaka*)—

Having seen and heard these, all the gods and sages and all the women  
Fainted and returned to consciousness again and again in quick succession.  
The stealing of the gopīs' clothes, the lamentation of the group of gopīs,  
The presentation to them of their clothes, the homage, the granting of a boon,  
And the vow to Kātyāyanī, the eating of the food of the brahmins' wives,  
The destruction of the worship of Indra and of his pride, the worship of the mountain  
And the description of Vṛindāban—all heard these again  
And they attained together first unconsciousness and then consciousness.<sup>77</sup>

The divine beings heaped gifts and praises upon Upavarhaṇa and urged him  
(I.12.4 ff.) to continue with other themes from the Kṛishṇa cycle:

And let us hear now the going to Mathurā of Kṛishṇa the Supreme Self,  
And the lamentation of the cowherds and cowherd girls !  
Perform the Great Festival (*mahotsava*) again ; let the sages and deities hear it.  
And let these groups of apsarases sing and dance the saṁgīta.  
And, heeding the word of Brahmā, the groups of apsarases danced,  
They and the vidyādhārīs performed the charming song in the assembly,  
And the Gandharva Upavarhaṇa, best of the artful ones,  
Sang in the *saṁdhāna* measure Hari's going to Mathurā.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Banerjea, ed., pp. 76 f., I.11.1–8 :

atha gandharvvarājas tu bhagavānājñayā vidheḥ  
saṁgītaṁ ca jagau tatra kṛishṇarāsamahotsavam. (1)  
sushamaṁ tālamānaṁ ca sutānaṁ madhuraṁ śrutaṁ  
vīṇāmṛidaṅgamurujayuktaṁ dhvanisamanvitaṁ (2)  
rāgiṇīyuktarāgeṇa samayoktena sundaraṁ  
mādhuryyaṁ murchanāyuktaṁ manaso harshakāraṇaṁ (3)  
vicitraṁ nṛityaruciraṁ rupaveśam anuttamaṁ  
lokānurāgavījaṁ ca nāṭyopayuktahastakaṁ (4)  
dṛiṣṭvā śrutvā surāḥ sarve munayaḥ sarvvayoshitaḥ  
mūrcchāṁ prāpuḥ ca sahasā cetanāṁ ca punaḥ punaḥ. (5)  
gopīnāṁ vastraharaṇaṁ gopīgaṇavilāpanaṁ  
tābhyo vastrapradānaṁ ca sammānaṁ varadānaṁ (6)  
kātyāyanīvrataṁ cā 'pi vipradārānnabhojanaṁ  
mahendradarppapūjādibhañjanaṁ śailapūjanaṁ (7)  
punaḥ ca śuśruvuḥ sarve śrīvṛindāvanavarṇanaṁ  
samprāpuḥ ca punar mūrcchāṁ punaḥ prāpuḥ ca cetanāṁ. (8)

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 81, I.12.4–7 :

mathurāgamaṇaṁ cai 'va kṛishṇasya paramātmanaḥ  
vilāpaṁ gopagopīnāṁ śrāvayā 'smāś ca sāmprataṁ. (4)  
mahotsavam kuru punaḥ śṛiṇvantu munayaḥ surāḥ.  
gāyantu tāś ca saṁgītaṁ nṛityantv apsarasaṁ gaṇāḥ. (5)  
brahmaṇaś ca vacaḥ śrutvā nanṛituś cā 'psarogaṇāḥ  
cakruḥ tāḥ sarasaṁ gītaṁ vidyādharyyaś ca saṁsadi (6)  
māyinaṁ cai 'va pravaro gandharvaś co 'pavarhaṇaḥ  
jagau saṁdhānabhāvena mathurāgamaṇaṁ hareḥ. (7)



Overwhelmed on the stage by the pathos of the *Mathurāgamana* theme, Upavarhaṇa falters and is brought to ruin by the displeasure of the gods. We need not follow the tale further, but we must point out the emotionality of these saṃgītas as one of the many ties that connect them with the art of Vallabh, the dancer, and to that of the players mentioned in the *Āsā kī Vār*. Another tie is the word *mahotsava*, used in I.12.5 as a variant on the *Kṛishṇarāsa-mahotsava* of I.11.1; Vallabh, too, 'performs the Great *mahotsav*' (see p. 229 n., line 5). The 'universally pleasing themes' in Upavarhaṇa's repertoire, with the single exception of the 'description of Vṛindāban', can all be found in Chapter Seven in the list of lilās played even today, under the headings *Cīrharāṇ*, *Chāk*, *Govardhan*, *Mathurāgaman*, and *Mahārās Līlā*. We have in these saṃgītas a form that preserves a substantial identity with the ancient Kṛishṇa dramas and yet has a visible kinship with the sixteenth-century forms of the modern rāslīlā. But a chasm lies between them and the kīrttaniyā of the late sixteenth century and all its later developments because the actors of these saṃgītas are not children and because the intricate hand symbols (*nāṭyopayuktahastaka*) seen here must have been in disuse from the time when child actors were first employed. The rāslīlā is not the continuance of such a saṃgīta, but its reconstruction. This reconstruction occurred at a time when the ancient *hastakas* had ceased to communicate and when simplification was the price of survival. Certain trainers of actors apparently made a virtue of this necessity, employed children, and added to the Vaishṇava theater at this time the assets, at least, of innocence and juvenile charm. With this major technical change, players continued to handle the familiar tales for the same sectarian community.

We repeat that the use of child actors (*svarūps*) was not the ancient practice of the Kṛishṇa cult. Our śailālakas of ancient Mathurā were the fathers of grown sons. The 'apsarases' of the Harivaṃśa who presented the citras of Kṛishṇa's deeds were not juveniles but women, *striyaḥ* (see p. 237 n., v. 15a). Loṇaśobhikā, who was a grandmother, continued to use her professional name. We have already brought together above (page 230) the many indications that adult actors held the central roles in Kṛishṇa dramas in Braj at the beginning of the sixteenth century. At the end of that century the use of *svarūps* had become firmly established. What was the inspiration for this revolution in personnel?

The impersonation of deities by children is not a convention of the Sanskrit stage. A. V. W. Jackson in his article 'Children on the Stage in Hindu Drama'<sup>79</sup> turns up no hint of any such practice. The theory that children were selected to play the roles of Kṛishṇa and the gopīs because Kṛishṇa and the gopīs

<sup>79</sup> A. V. W. Jackson, 'Children on the Stage in Hindu Drama', *The Looker-On*, 5 (1897), 509-16, abstracted in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 27 (1896), Proceedings, pp. v, vi.

were children, only leads us to ask, 'Why and how, in the sixteenth century, did this natural fact become at last a compelling consideration?'

It is our belief that the representation of deities by children was a practice of the Śāktas of north-eastern India and that it entered the Vaishṇava stage as an influence from them. In substantiation of this claim we shall show how an established form of old Kṛishṇa drama—the enacting of the *Gītāgovinda* of Jayadeva—was modified in just this manner in this region under the influence of specific Śākta practices.

The impersonation of deities by children is a well-established custom among Śāktas. Ritual worship of Śakti is often addressed to a small girl, a virgin under the age of puberty, who for the time being represents Kumārī.<sup>80</sup> Theodor Aufrecht, commenting on certain Śākta rites referred to in the seventh *Ullāsa* of a manuscript of the Kulārṇava Tantra in the Bodleian Library, remarks, 'Boys of five to nine years were employed in these rites, and by meditating on the god (*devatābuddhyā*) they represented Śiva, just as girls from the second to the ninth year of age represented Śakti.'<sup>81</sup> *Devatābuddhyā* suggests a belief in an internal unitive relationship between the child impersonator and the god. The North Indian theology of the svarūp (see p. 18) seems already to be present here. These conventions and conceptions of Śākta ritual have found expression in northeastern India's religious dramas also. In a standard biography of Ramakrishṇa we read regarding his childhood in Bengal, 'Once when he was about nine years of age, he had to appear in the role of Śiva in a dramatic performance in his village,' and that a sense of the divine presence so affected him that he fell into a trance.<sup>82</sup> In the *nirtakalī* of Pūrṇiyā District in Bihar, referred to by Francis Buchanan, the impersonation of Śiva and Pārvatī was done entirely by boys.<sup>83</sup>

Sylvain Lévi in his volumes on Nepal describes how, in the pageantry of the great festal processions of that country, children impersonate the divine figures both Vaishṇava and Śaiva. The Śaktis or divine energies of tantrism are represented by virgins who are chosen with great care. The virgin of six or seven years who has this role in the Indrayātrā first proves that the goddess

<sup>80</sup> Siva Chandra Vidyarnava Bhattacharyya, *Principles of Tantra*, 2 (London, Luzac & Co., 1916), 159.

<sup>81</sup> Theodor Aufrecht, *Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Sanscriticorum Postvedicorum quotquot in Bibliotheca Bodleiana Adservantur*, Pars 1 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1859), p. 91 n.: 'Quinque sive novem annorum pueri in his sacris adhibebantur, iique (*devatābuddhyā*) Śivam, velut puellae, inde a primo ad nonum aetatis annum, Śaktim representabant.' Compare the practice of Bhavai actors described by Gargi (*Folk Theater of India*, p. 56), who begin their stage proceedings with meditation intended to induce the presence of the goddess Ambā Mātā.

<sup>82</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 2 (1st ed. Calcutta, Belur Math, n.d.), 460.

<sup>83</sup> Buchanan, *Account of the District of Purnea*, p. 516.

is present in her by passing successfully through an ordeal of horror. If she emerges from the test without flinching, she is honored by the king and all the people as the goddess in person.<sup>84</sup> The employment of svarūps, as we see, was widespread and of some antiquity in Bengal, Bihar and Nepal.

Notice now the special forms taken by the theatrical rendering of the *Gītagovinda* in those regions where Śākta influence prevails. We must defend first the rather bold statement that the *Gītagovinda* is a dramatic work. Winternitz has said flatly, 'We really cannot reckon the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva as dramatic poetry,' and other major literary authorities of the century have tended to agree.<sup>85</sup> The arguments of these scholars from the literary form of the work are cogent, but they are swept aside by evidence that the *Gītagovinda* was often as a matter of historical fact presented in dance. In the Saraswati Mahal Library in Tanjore there are two worn and incomplete paper manuscripts of the text of the *Gītagovinda* with full aids for dancers. The manuscripts have been collated and published recently in an edition by K. Vasudeva Sastri in which one finds word-by-word instructions regarding mudrās and movements to be used in enacting its lines visually.<sup>86</sup> There is fair indication that these manuscripts came originally from North India.<sup>87</sup> The evidence of actual performance which they provide is supported by the testimony of modern eye-witnesses who describe how the *Gītagovinda* was and is performed in Malabar. Emily Gilchrist Hatch in her dissertation on Kathakalī describes how, after the preliminary prayers and before the main performance, there comes a period called the Manjutara which is devoted to the singing and miming of selections from Jayadeva:

This is the part of the performance where the singers and drummers have an opportunity to show their skill. The choicest verses of the *Gītagovinda*, the Song of Govinda, are sung. The actors are present and interpret the song with gestures but the main interest is in the music. When the song is finished the actors exit and the drummers take the stage.<sup>88</sup>

C. A. Menon in his survey of the traditional dramas of Malabar describes still another modern form of such enactment: '*Aṣṭapadiyattam* is the staging of the famous Gīta-Govinda of Jayadeva. . . . The songs are sung in the traditional

<sup>84</sup> Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal*, 2, 41, 368.

<sup>85</sup> Winternitz, 'Kṛṣṇa-Dramen', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 124; Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 272; Sushil Kumar De, 'Sanskrit Literature under the Sena Kings of Bengal', in S. M. Katre and P. K. Gode, eds., *A Volume of Eastern and Indian Studies presented to Professor F. W. Thomas* (Bombay, Karnatak Publishing House, 1939), pp. 68 ff.; Dasgupta and De, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 393-95.

<sup>86</sup> K. Vasudeva Sastri, ed., *Gīta Govinda with Abhinaya* (Tanjore, S. Gopalan, Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Series No. 6; *Madras Government Oriental Series*, Vol. LXI, 1951).

<sup>87</sup> A. C. Burnell, *A Classified Index to the Sanskrit MSS in the Palace at Tanjore* (London, Trübner & Co., 1880), pp. 157 f., and Introduction, p. vi; Vasudeva Sastri, ed., p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> Emily Gilchrist Hatch, 'The Kathakali, The Indigenous Drama of Malabar' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1934), pp. 83 f.



way and their meaning is interpreted through acting and gesture language to the accompaniment of dance.'<sup>89</sup>

An Uriya inscription of the fifteenth century shows that Jayadeva's work was performed in song and dance at that time at the great Vaishṇava center at Purī: It is a standing order of King Pratāparudra of Orissa, dated the equivalent of July 17th, A.D. 1499, providing that the *Gītagovinda* shall be performed every evening before the images of Balarāma and Jagannātha in the period before they are bid goodnight. No song is to be learned by the Tailaṅga dancing-girls other than the *Gītagovinda*. The inscription continues, as translated by Mon Mohan Chakravarti: 'They will not sing any other song. No other kind of dancing (nāta) should be performed before the god. Besides the dancing, there are four Vaishṇava singers; they will sing only the *Gītagovinda*.'<sup>90</sup>

These performances must have been a familiar sight to Caitanya, who loved the *Gītagovinda*, and to the crowds of Vaishṇavas who flocked about him during his many years of residence at Purī. In these lines there is some indication of the technique employed. The devadāsīs sang as well as danced, and the four Vaishṇava singers mentioned seem likely to have formed an accompanying chorus.

The *Gītagovinda* is a favorite in Bengal. Sir William Jones long ago called it 'a little Pastoral Drama' and said that the people of Kenduli in Burdwan District, who claim Jayadeva as a fellow-townsmen, 'celebrate in honor of him an annual jubilee, passing a whole night in representing his drama, and in singing his beautiful songs.'<sup>91</sup>

Bringing together all these testimonies, we are entitled to say that, since A.D. 1500 at least, the *Gītagovinda* has been widely performed in southern and eastern India by techniques of opera and ballet similar to or identical with those used in the Kṛishṇa dramas mentioned in the Harivaṁśa, Viṣṇu, and Bhāgavata Purāṇas. We can also say—bringing together an even wider circle of information—that there existed in the fifteenth century, from the literary point of view, at least two types of Kṛishṇaite mystery plays. One tradition, which was to prevail in Braj, was based as directly as possible on the purāṇic texts. In technique it was sometimes called *saṁgīta*. The other type had its literary basis in the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva. Both were dance dramas, presenting their respective compositions in the elaborate symbols of

<sup>89</sup> C. A. Menon, 'The Histrionic Art of Malabar,' *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 9 (1941), 121.

<sup>90</sup> Mon Mohan Chakravarti, 'Uriya Inscriptions of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 62 (1893), 96 f.

<sup>91</sup> Sir William Jones, 'On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus,' *Asiatick Researches*, 3 (1792), 183.



*bhārata nāṭyam*. Their actors were necessarily non-juvenile because of the long training that their elaborate art required. Both underwent radical transformations in northern India, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa tradition becoming of course the modern rāslilā.

Our present effort is to discover the influence under which the Braj tradition began to employ children in its central roles. An answer will be suggested if we notice the changed forms which *Gītagovinda* performances take as we trace them into North Indian regions in which the Śākta religion was strong. Francis Buchanan, for instance, took note of certain performers of the *Gītagovinda* who lived in the district of Pūrṇiyā in Bihar a century and a half ago:

In the western part of the district many boys of the tribe of weavers called Jola are taught to dance and sing the poems of Jayadeva called *Gīt-Govinda*. They also sing love songs and poems concerning the amours of Kṛishṇa. One or two boys and six or seven men compose a set; two of the men beat small drums (tabla), and the others beat small cymbals (*mandira*). They are employed at marriages, at the festival of Durga, and at that called Holi.<sup>92</sup>

Notice that the dancing women of Tanjore and Purī are replaced here by boys. These children evidently impersonate the deities, because the six or seven men of the troupe are all accounted for as players of drums and cymbals. Their art of dance could scarcely have been the ancient one—not because they are weavers, but because they are children. Note also that the Sanskrit text of the *Gītagovinda* no longer has the sole place: Other ‘love songs and poems concerning the amours of Kṛishṇa’ are in use.

That these tendencies were established characteristics of the stage use of the *Gītagovinda* in the northeast is confirmed by Sylvain Lévi’s account of related performances in Nepal. He has published in two places his recollections of an evening performance that he attended in Katmandu in the year 1898.

I have myself seen enacted, five years ago in the Nepalese Himalayas . . . a kind of *Gita-Govinda* . . . one night of early spring. It was the night of Holi . . . a small boy played the part of Kṛishṇa, crowned by a gilded mitre, dressed in a spangled tunic, a flute in his hand.<sup>93</sup>

Another smaller boy played Rādhā, the beloved of Kṛishṇa, and, lastly, some children of eight to twelve years played Rādhā’s herd-girl companions. At the start came the chorus and symphony of the orchestra. A large curtain was opened showing the likenesses of Kṛishṇa and Rādhā. Incense was burned, lamps were swung, hymns were chanted. Then the spectacle itself began. From 9 p.m. to 4 a.m., the same subject: Rādhā sings of her bewildered passion and laments her forlornness; Kṛishṇa thinks only of playing on his flute. Rādhā’s friends come to console her. One of them goes to Kṛishṇa to beg him to satisfy his sweetheart. Tired of strife, he yields for a moment. The cowherd girls flock in, and Kṛishṇa leads a round dance, the Rās Līlā. Then he returns to his flute and all recommences. The monotony of this theme is varied a little by the fantasies of the Vidushaka. He alone among the personae of the fantasy is dressed in Nepalese style.<sup>94</sup>

These players seen by Lévi were not rāsdhārīs of Braj. Players from Mathurā have not been allowed to enter Nepal within living memory. More important,

<sup>92</sup> Buchanan, p. 516.

<sup>93</sup> Gaston Courtillier, trans., *Le Gita-govinda, pastorale de jayadeva*, preface, p. vi.

<sup>94</sup> Lévi, *Le Népal*, 2, 406.

the players of Mathurā take their traditional themes freely from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and do not enact the *Gītagovinda* because they object to its view that the amours of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa were an adulterous relation. This performance at Katmandu, however, is based upon the *Gītagovinda*. Its plot is the narrative of Jayadeva, not that of the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Also, the calendar of this festival is that of Jayadeva, not that of the purāṇa. The performance is a part of the spring festival of Holī, which Jayadeva makes the time of Kṛishṇa's rāsa with the gopīs. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa places this event on a full-moon night of autumn. These players adhere to a tradition of Bengal, using Bengal's great poem in some vernacular transformation and showing Bengal's powerful tantric influence in its theology—and, we dare say, in its use of child actors to impersonate the deities.

Yet this tantra-influenced tradition has been in interaction with the traditions of Braj. The curtain, the ritual opening, the costume of Kṛishṇa, and the employment of child actors are the distinctive characteristics which are shared. This eastern influence was already being exerted in Braj in the sixteenth century, as is evidenced by Abul Fazl's reference to the kīrttaniyā (above, page 231)—a name which we can trace only in eastern India. Here, already, we find firm datable evidence of the performance of Kṛishṇa drama in North India by 'smooth-faced boys.' As to whence this practice came, all available indications point toward Bengal, and toward the ritual and theatrical practices of the Śāktas. Thence, so far as we can tell, came the impetus which led to the experiments with child actors which are attributed to Ghamanḍi and Nārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭ.

As we see it, then, the history of the two literary types of medieval Kṛishṇa drama was this. Under the burden of the deprivations and tabus which Muslim dominance brought, both these traditions made a literary shift from their original medieval languages to the use of modern vernaculars. The use of the elaborate dance tradition of bhārata nāṭyam broke down. In this technological vacuum, the Śākta practice of using child actors to impersonate the deities spread and became dominant among the Vaishṇavas as well. We have actually been able to trace this change in the performances based upon the *Gītagovinda*. We dare assume that, under the same historical conditions and under the same Śākta influence, the same transformation occurred in the theater based upon the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

This chapter can close with a confident affirmation that Kṛishṇaite miracle plays have been produced in Mathurā for two thousand years. After some hesitation (because the evidences are by no means continuous), we venture to maintain that the regional language, not Sanskrit, has dominated the Vaishṇava theater of Braj during these centuries. The decisive consideration is an argument from silence—silence in Sanskrit. Winternitz and others have been

puzzled by the absence of old Sanskrit dramas on Kṛishṇaite themes. We know of many factors encouraging to the production of plays about Kṛishṇa: The Kṛishṇa cult is older than the Sanskrit drama; the cult of Kṛishṇa was active in the theater from its beginning, as we have seen; the prominence of the Śaurasenī dialect of Mathurā in Sanskrit plays points toward Mathurā as a theatrical center. Yet there is not one undoubtedly ancient Sanskrit drama that deals with the life of Kṛishṇa. The earliest Sanskrit drama on this theme is the *Gopālakelicandrikā*, mentioned above, which post-dates both the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Rāmānuja. Sanskrit dramas about Kṛishṇa begin to appear in number only in the sixteenth century, as a result of the self-conscious literary promotions of the Caitanyaite intellectuals.<sup>95</sup> We offer this explanation of the mystery of the missing Kṛishṇa dramas: For these many centuries the enacting of the deeds of Kṛishṇa has been the preserve of those who speak the dialect that is regarded as Kṛishṇa's mother tongue. The rāsdhārīs of modern Braj view the performing of Kṛishṇa's līlās by anyone other than residents of Kṛishṇa's own home as an intrusion and a ridiculous imposture. The deference and freedom from rivalry which they enjoy in all Hindī-speaking areas testify to the respect with which their claim is viewed. The scarcity of early Sanskrit Kṛishṇa dramas probably reflects the success of Mathurā actors in maintaining a monopoly in former times as well.

In this jigsaw puzzle of artistic history in which the original picture was never simple and from which most of the pieces have been lost, one cannot be dogmatic about any reconstruction of the past. But the fragments that are available in the middle of the twentieth century can all be accommodated in the foregoing view of the development of Kṛishṇa dramas in Mathurā.

<sup>95</sup> Winternitz, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 74 (1920), 123 f.







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### THE DRAMAS IN RETROSPECT

The number and distinctiveness of the dramas found in Mathurā have been a continuing surprise. Few Western cities can present a wider variety of stage activities, even when they possess every common form from Christmas pageants to ballet and grand opera; the dramas of Mathurā are as numerous and they differ from each other fully as much. They differ also from every familiar Western theatrical type. Special Indian needs bring them into being, and special Indian conditions give them their characteristic shape. Before seeing them, the author was not able to surmise their nature by speculating on the basis of Western experience, or by sifting casual literary references.

The mass of descriptive detail in this study is at the same time its essence. The book does not lend itself to summarization. We shall conclude, not with a résumé, but with several reflections upon the nature of the plays as a whole.

These North Indian dramas are not primitive. When one considers their function in the regional culture one realizes that one should not speak of them as 'the rustic folk drama' as some 'modern' Indian writers of bygone generations have done. The dignity of the dramas approaches that of literature, with which they have a close connection. The stage people of Braj are literate, and they or their playwrights draw upon the society's recognized religious writings—not on its Sanskrit scriptures, true, but on the transformation of the Sanskrit heritage in Hindī works of the highest literary standing. They do not cater to the dead level of mass tastes, but inculcate traditional ideals which are approved by the society's most honored classes. Their dramas are refined, in most or all senses of that word.

The first competency of the actors of Braj is a certain acquaintance with literature, and the second is a complete knowledge of the mind of the common people. Their professional skill is the bridging of the gap between the thinking of great literary figures and the concerns and capacities of the masses who

read little or not at all. The *rāslīlā* draws upon fine old treasures of cultivated verse and renews the ability of the living generations, literate and illiterate alike, to appreciate Hindī religious poetry. The *Rāmlīlā* brings a beautiful but archaic religious epic within the understanding of the ordinary villager. To do so, it uses the dialects of two eras, two areas, and two different levels of culture, mediating effectively between them. All of the dramas are interpretations of scripture, directly or remotely. *Rāmlīlā*, *rāslīlā*, and kathak performances reflect even in their external forms the structure of a traditional Indian commentary with its text. The effectiveness of the dramas lies in their having been created by persons of religious spirit and literary skill who possess at the same time a keen sense of what unlettered people can understand.

It is not easy to generalize about the aesthetic qualities of such different productions as the amateur *Rāmlīlā* on the one hand, and the highly professional kathak and *rāslīlā* on the other. As a whole they manifest sincerity, discipline, a trained and controlled taste, and a sophisticated skill. One might call the *Rāmlīlā* or the *Bhaktamāl* plays rambling and ingenuous; but they are not coarse. Few of the plays are courtly, but none are crude.

The social status of the Vaishṇava actors is high. They suffer none of the contempt that ancient India heaped upon the stage professions. Vaishṇavas cannot be contemptuous of actors in whom Viṣṇu himself is not ashamed to dwell. Brahmans do not disdain to perform in these religious plays. The Vaishṇavas hold their stage people in respect, and in return they receive the service of playwrights, producers, and actors who are persons of education and taste.

We have been startled to discover that the creation of Hindu mythology has not ceased. We have come upon several workshops where the craft continues. Even in the twentieth century new myths are being made, and the directors and writers of these miracle plays are deeply involved in their manufacture. The impulse behind their creation is the eagerness of audiences for fresh yet authentic *līlās* of Kṛishṇa and for satisfying new episodes in the history of Rāma. We have noted how such expansion of story is effected and justified. With new stresses in religious feeling, mythology and theology expand in corresponding directions. In the didactic dialogues of *jhāṅkī* and elsewhere we have seen new theological tendencies expressing themselves in literary forms reminiscent of epics or tantras.

The miracle plays seen in Mathurā can be seen throughout North India, with varying frequency. The availability of performances in ordinary North Indian communities seems to range from a rarity, in the case of professional kathaks, to near-universality in the case of the *Rāmlīlā*. Religious theater cannot be as prominent in the average district as it is in Mathurā, but we venture to believe that one or more of these forms of drama are known almost

everywhere. They have been a significant factor in maintaining the continuity of traditional Hindu society.

This study has been devoted primarily to religious institutions, but some of its findings have significance for the understanding of the history of language, literature, politics, and culture in general. The touring of great numbers of troupes from cultic centers is not unrelated to the increase in the currency of the languages used in these centers. The *rāsmaṇḍalis* of Brāj leave behind them in their travels not only new devotees of Kṛishṇa, but new competence in Brājbhāshā and new interest in its literature. A performance of the Rāmlīlā is more than a lesson in epic ideals. It is also a lesson in Āvadhī.

The miracle plays survive under a strain that is especially acute in the present generation. The education of the generality of citizens is moving farther and farther away from old linguistic and religious dialects. The thought and language of Sūrdās and Tulsīdās, now four centuries old, present all the difficulties Shakespeare would have for us if in addition he had been a Scotsman. The gap which the players are called upon to bridge is widening, and the time will come when the best dramatic skills will not be able to make the old poetry live. The *jhāñkī* players and the actors of the *Bhaktamāl* tales have already turned to the use of standard Hindī, but the others are tied, by the special interpretative function for which their art was fashioned, to old dialectical poems which are becoming increasingly difficult to explain successfully. Their stage needs less archaic expressions of Hindu ideals, but it must wait for literary men to produce them. There must be a renaissance in religious literature like that of the sixteenth century if these particular forms of drama are to continue long.

None of the dramas described in this book has a clearly remembered origin. Our efforts to trace their history have brought into a clearer light the creative ferment that was working in Hindu religious life in the sixteenth century. During that period the Vaishṇava cults, which had long been dependent upon obsolete languages and on complicated artistic forms of dwindling effectiveness, dealt realistically with the difficulties of their situation and created new forms of drama that carried out once more the intended function of the old. In that century, it seems, the last efforts to use on the stage the sign language of the enfeebled classical dance were given up in North India in favor of simpler gestures and more naturalistic acting. The new techniques were easier to learn, easier to understand, and more effective in the circumstances of the time. Not timeless, not the endless repetition of ancient stereotypes, these dramas have adapted to the capacities and interests of the changing generations.

Most of the plays have historical roots that go back into medieval or ancient times, but their line of development involves radical modifications, and their more remote history can be seen only fragmentarily and vaguely. In our search

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for the ancient lineage of the Vaishṇava mystery plays we have focused attention upon certain very old types of choral or operatic dance drama. Though they are not described in the standard manuals of Hindu dramaturgy, their existence had been surmised by several generations of scholars. Through such dance dramas, the stage tradition of the Kṛishṇa cult of Mathurā goes back to origins as old as those of any known theater of India.



APPENDIX

Partial Translation of a Handbill  
MATHURĀ'S RĀMLĪLĀ CALENDAR FOR 1949

*Reverence to Śrī Rāmcandra !*

*'Without association with the good  
There's no telling of the story of Hari ;  
Without that, no flight of delusion,  
And without delusion's departure,  
No firm love of Rāma's feet.'*

*September 16 :*

With the impersonators of Jānakī, Bharat, Lakshmaṇ, and Śatrughna present in full dress, the wrist-cords will be tied [solemnly binding all to fulfil their respective duties until the end of the festival season]. After this, all the actors go from the front of the mosque into Paṇḍit Kāvalīsiṅh's temple. They turn back and go into Dūrgācand Lane via the Central Bazaar. The drama of the wedding of Śiv with Pārvatī. The reducing of Kāmdev to ashes, etc.

*September 17 :*

The terrible austerities of Nārad. Sent by Indra, Kāmdev comes with apsaras. Nārad goes to Śiv. Nārad's conceit and his going to the Lord Viṣṇu. The Lord's creation of an illusory city to rid Nārad of his conceit. Nārad's falling in love with Viśvamohanī and his going to the Lord and asking for a handsome appearance, and the Lord's giving him the shape of a monkey and destroying Nārad's pride. Nārad's cursing the Lord. Svāyambhuvamanu's going to do austerities; his vision of the Lord. The birth of Rāvaṇ and his doing austerities. His asking a boon of Brahmā and achieving universal victory.

*September 18 :*

The procession moves from Rāy Bahādur Paṇḍit Kāvalīsiṅh's temple and goes to the Asakuṇḍā Bazaar by way of Bharatpur Gate and Tilak Gate. The going of the gods to Brahmā. Then Brahmā and all the hosts of gods and the Earth in the form of a cow are fearful and recite the praises of Nārāyaṇ. The voice from the heavens. Thereafter the procession will pass the Svāmīghāṭ Mosque and end at Rāy Bahādur Paṇḍit Kāvalīsiṅh's temple.

*September 19 :*

The celebration of the birth of Rām and his brothers will be held. The christening, the childhood play, and Rām's exhibition of his vastness. King Janak's ploughing because of a famine, and Jānakī's appearing from the earth.

*September 20 :*

The sage Viśvāmitra asks Daśarath the Lord of Avadh for Raghunāth and Lakshmaṇ to protect a sacrifice, takes them, goes onward, and rests on the way in the ancient ashram of the Ṛishis. (This drama will take place in front of the Temple of Vaidya Ratna Paṇḍit Sohanlāl Pāṭhak.) The killing of Tāṛakā and the demons on the road. Viśvāmitra's performing the sacrifice, and the attack of the innumerable army of demons on the assembly of sages in order to interrupt the sacrifice. Raghunāth's killing of Mārīc, Tāṛakā, and Subāhu with a headless arrow. The destruction of all the demons by the arrows of Lakshmaṇ. Rāmcandra's going to Janakpur with Lakshmaṇ and Viśvāmitra. The deliverance on the way of Ahilyā by the dust of Rām's feet. The bathing and worshiping in the Ganges. Arrival at Janakpur. (This drama will be held at night at the Kaṭrā also.) Tāṛakā's procession will start from Rāy Bahādur Paṇḍit Kāvalīsiṅh's temple, and that of Rāmcandra and Viśvāmitra will move from the Temple of Mahādev Mathurānāth at Ḍīg Gate.

*September 21 :*

The arrival of Rāmcandra with Lakshmaṇ to see the splendor of Janakpur, and the Janakpur ladies' talking among themselves. Janak's daughter goes with her companions to worship Pārvatī. At the sage Viśvāmitra's order Raghunāth with Lakshmaṇ arrives in the flower garden. Rāmcandra and Jānakī's sight of each other, their falling in love and exchanging of glances.

*September 22 :*

The presence of many kings at Sītā's *svayaṃvar*, and Raghunāth's breaking the bow with his lotus hands. Paraśurām's sudden coming in great wrath into the hall of sacrifice. The dialogue between Paraśurām and Lakshmaṇ. Paraśurām's going to the forest after testing and praising Rām. King Janak inquires of Viśvāmitra and sends a messenger to Ayodhyā. The messenger's arrival in Ayodhyā, the delivery of the letter, and the joy after it is read.

*September 23 :*

The wedding procession of King Daśarath from Ayodhyā to Janakpur (from Bāṭīvālī Grove via the Central Bazaar, Kaserat Bazaar, Svāmīghāṭ, Tilak Gate, Bharatpur Gate, and the front of the mosque, into the enclosed market). Enactment of the wedding of Rāmcandra.

*September 24 :*

King Daśarath's preparation to anoint Rāmcandra to the kingship. Mother Kaikeyī's going into the sulking-chamber on the instigation of the slave woman Mantharā. The dialogue between King Daśarath and Kaikeyī. Rām is ordered to the forest.

*September 25 :*

Rām, Jānakī and Lakshmaṇ have hermit's clothing made and go in procession on foot from the enclosed market of Jānakīdās into the new Svāmīghāṭ Bazaar in front of the shop of Lālā Lallomal. The interview with the king of the Nishāds. The leave-taking of Sumant. Their dialogue with Kevaṭ at Viśrāmghāṭ, their sitting in the boat and disembarkation across the Ganges at Bengālīghāṭ. The farewell to Kevaṭ. The Lord's going to the ashram of the Ṛishi Bharadvāj (in the Jairāmdās temple in the Bihārīdās compound). The carriage procession and the performance by the inhabitants in Javāhargāñj. The arrival, via Bharatpur Gate, at Vālmīki's ashram at the Ghee Market in Kiśorīramāṅgañj. The affectionate interview. The going from there to Citrakūṭ via the Śāhgañj Gate.

*September 26 :*

The procession of the host of Bhīls will begin from the Temple of Rāy Bahādur Paṇḍit Kāvalisīṅh and will go to the Red Gate via Svāmīghāṭ, Chattā Bazaar, Tilak Gate, the police station and the Central Bazaar. Bharat will start with the inhabitants of Avadh from Govindgañj. Accompanied by the procession of Bhīls, Bharat will arrive at Citrakūṭ via Chattā Bazaar, Ḍorī Bazaar, the Central Square, and the Red Gate. The meeting and conversation between Rām and Bharat at Citrakūṭ.

*September 27 :*

Jayant goes in the form of a crow and pecks at the feet of Jānakī. Bhagavān pierces his eye. Bhagavān goes into the ashram of the Ṛishis and grants interview to all. His arrival at Pañcavaṭī. Sūrpnakhā's ribaldry with Rāmcandra. Lakshmaṇ cuts off Sūrpnakhā's nose and ears. Khar and Dūshaṇ make war on Rāmcandra, and Rāmcandra kills the three demons and their army. Rāmcandra pursues Mārīc in the guise of a golden deer; Rāvaṇ comes in the dress of a holy man, steals Sītā, and takes her away. Rāvaṇ's fight with Jaṭāyu. Jaṭāyu is wounded by Rāvaṇ. Rām's wandering in search of Sītā. He meets Jaṭāyu and performs his cremation.

## APPENDIX

### *September 28:*

Rāmcandra goes to the hermitage of Śabarī. Śabarī's hospitality. Kabandh's death at the hands of Bhagavān. Bhagavān meets Nārad, Hanumān and Sugrīv, and makes friends with them. The fight of Bālī with Sugrīv and the killing of Bālī. Tārā's mourning. The coronation of Sugrīv. Lakshmaṇ goes in a rage to Kishkindhā. Sugrīv sends the monkeys. Hanumān goes to Laṅkā with a ring and tells Sītā of the welfare of Rāmcandra. His battle with the demons after the conversation, and his return with a bracelet.

### *September 29:*

Rāmcandra meets Vibhīṣaṇ and inquires about the secret. The placing of the image of Rāmeśvar on the seashore and the construction of the bridge. Aṅgad goes into the court of Rāvaṇ. The firm planting of his foot. The controversy. The attack on Laṅkā. Meghnād's terrible battle with Lakshmaṇ. The Śakti weapon strikes Lakshmaṇ. Rāmcandra's lament. Hanumān brings the physician Susheṇ and the medicine. Lakshmaṇ wakes from unconsciousness. After a battle, Kumbhkaraṇ is killed.

### *September 30:*

Lakshmaṇ's terrible battle with Meghnād. Meghnād is killed. Sulocanā goes to Rāmcandra to recover Meghnād's head, and becomes a satī.

### *October 1:*

Ahirāvaṇ kidnaps Rāmcandra and takes him to Pātāl. Hanumān brings him back after killing that rascal. Rāvaṇ's grim fight with Rāmcandra. The killing of Rāvaṇ. Jānakī's meeting with the king. Vibhīṣaṇ's enthronement.

### *October 2:*

The procession of Rāmcandra will start from Citrakūṭ and will come to the Central Bazaar via Śāhgañj Gate and the Red Gate. The procession of Bharat will start from Govindgañj, and the meeting with Bharat will take place in the Central Square. They will then go to the compound of Lālā Jānakīdās by way of Svāmīghāṭ, the Chattā Bazaar, Tilak Gate and the Ghee Market.

### *October 3:*

The coronation of Rām. The reciting of praises by the [personified] Vedas. The farewell to Sugrīv and the other monkeys. Rām's sermon on the duty of a king to his subjects.

### *October 4:*

The Rāmlīlā's benediction and oblation ceremonies, etc.





## GLOSSARY OF INDIC WORDS

This word list is intended to lighten the burden of readers who lack familiarity with Indian languages or with the special vocabulary of the Indian theater. Assuming that linguists will not need its help, it defines the Indic words that occur in the English text only. The scope of the glossary has been limited in several additional ways in order to keep its length within practical bounds. It leaves to English dictionaries those Indian words that have been adopted into the English language. The identification of the mythological persons mentioned in this book would in itself require another volume; readers can find any help that may be necessary in John Dowson's *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion* (6th ed., London, Kegan Paul, 1928). Words are defined only in the meanings that are relevant in the contexts of this book. Many have a multitude of other senses, which must be left to Hindī and Sanskrit dictionaries.

When words occur in the book in standard Hindī forms and in other related forms as well, the Hindī form is the main entry. Related Sanskrit forms are not listed separately unless their meaning is different, or their spelling varies from the Hindī in more than the inclusion of the inherent short -a. Sanskrit words are spelled traditionally, and Hindī words follow the spellings of the *Hindī-śabd-sāgar*. This policy ranges Hindī words alongside related Sanskrit words in spellings that may be shocking to Sanskritists. Those scholars will understand the necessity of spelling Hindī words in such a way that readers can find them in a standard Hindī dictionary.

*Abhayahasta*—‘Hand of safety’, a *mudrā* of Hindu iconography and of the Indian dance. The right hand is raised from the elbow with palm facing outward, in token of reassurance and blessing.

*Abhinaya*—Mime; the imitation of a person or the telling of a narrative in dance, using a register of traditional postures and gestures.

*Ackan*—A long, tight-fitting formal coat for men which buttons down the front.

- Adhyāya*—A division of a book; a chapter.
- Advaita*—‘Non-dual’, the non-dualistic interpretation of the teaching of the Upanishads and the Vedānta Sūtra, the best known form of which is the non-theistic system of Śaṅkara.
- Advaitin*—An adherent of the *advaita* teaching.
- Aiśvarya līlās*—Presentations of the deeds of Kṛishṇa that show the heroic, masterly aspect of his character.
- Āṅkh Miñcaunī Līlā*—See p. 166, *Līlā* No. 5.
- Anugraha līlās*—‘Sports of kindness,’ those deeds of Kṛishṇa in which he ensured salvation to demons by slaying them with his own hand.
- Aprakaṣṭa līlās*—‘Unmanifest sports,’ the deeds that Kṛishṇa performed in realms which are extramundane, and for that reason not open to human knowledge nor to dramatic re-enactment.
- Apsaras*—One of a class of mythical nymphs skilled in music and dancing. They normally dwell in celestial regions where they serve as the entertainers of the gods, but they frequent the earth from time to time.
- Ārasī*—‘Mirror,’ a mirror ring worn on the thumb of the right hand by women.
- Āratī*—A rite performed at the beginning and close of *pūjā* and of *rāslīlā* and *Rāmlīlā* performances, in which burning lamps or incense sticks are rotated in a certain pattern in front of the incarnate deity.
- Āsāvārī*—A particular *rāginī* or musical mode.
- Aṣṭachāp*—‘The Eight Seals,’ the collective title of a group of eight Hindī poets of the sixteenth century who were disciples of Vallabhācārya and his son, Viṭṭhalnāth, and supported them in the revival of the Kṛishṇa cult.
- Āśram*—The residence and retreat of a spiritual preceptor and his monastic disciples. The *āśrams* of leaders of the *bhaktimārga* serve also as centers for the edification of visiting lay people.
- Asur*—An evil superhuman being, hostile toward the gods; a demon.
- Āśvin*—In the Hindu calendar, a month which falls at the end of the rainy season, in September and October. It is preceded by Bhādoṇ and followed by Kārttik.
- Ātman*—The Supreme Being viewed as the Absolute Soul, the metaphysical basis of all souls.
- Avatāra*—A ‘descent’ or incarnation of a deity, especially of Viṣṇu.
- Bābājī*—‘Father, sire,’ respectful title for a *sādhu*.
- Bagalbandī*—A long jacket for men. It opens at the side, and is secured by a pair of strings tied under the arm.
- Bahulā Līlā*—See p. 173, *Līlā* No. 60.
- Bāl Kṛishṇa*—‘The Child Kṛishṇa,’ Kṛishṇa in the pre-adolescent form in which he is worshiped in the Kṛishṇa cult of Braj.

- Bāl līlās*—The deeds done by Kṛishṇa in his childhood home in Braj; the re-enactments of those deeds by actors.
- Bālmukund*—That form of Kṛishṇa in which he is represented as an infant. As an infant floating on a banyan leaf he will survive the flood of universal dissolution at the end of the cosmic age.
- Banjātrā*—An annual organized pilgrimage to the sacred spots of Braj. Its circuit includes every spot that is famous as the scene of one of Kṛishṇa's storied exploits.
- Banmālā*—A knee-length garland of five kinds of forest flowers worn particularly by Kṛishṇa.
- Banmālī*—'Wearer of the Banmālā,' an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Baṇsībaṭ*—'The Banyan Tree of the Flute,' the name of a spot in Vṛindāban from which Kṛishṇa is said to have called the *gopīs*.
- Banvārī*—Brajbhāshā form of *Banmālī*, q.v.
- Barāt*—A wedding company, made up of the relatives of the groom, that escorts him in procession to the house of the bride.
- Bāyāñ*—A small single-ended drum, the left-hand member of a pair of *tablās*.
- Bhādoṇ*—A rainy-season month of the Hindu calendar that follows the month of Śrāvaṇ, and falls in August and September.
- Bhajan*—A vernacular hymn of praise or petition to a deity, for group singing.
- Bhaktamāl*—A Hindī book on the lives of the Vaishṇava saints by Nābhādās (Nābhājī), completed in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is usually printed with a commentary written in A.D. 1712 by Priyā Dās.
- Bhakti*—'Loving devotion,' the ideal religious attitude, according to the teaching and practice of theistic Hinduism.
- Bhaktimārga*—The way of salvation through loving faith in a personal God, as distinguished from a way of mystical knowledge (*jñānamārga*) directed toward the same end, and from a way of dutiful action (*karmamārga*) which has a better rebirth as its immediate goal.
- Bhaktiras*—The sentiment of ardent theistic devotion as the dominant mood in a person or in a literary or dramatic work.
- Bhāñḍ*—A clown, jester, farcical impersonator.
- Bhārata nāṭyam*—Modern name for the classical Indian dance technique regularized in the ancient *Nāṭyaśāstra*, substantially preserved by the temple dancers of South India, and now revived on a national scale.
- Bharatmilāp*—In the *Rāmlīlā*, the re-enactment in pageantry of the reunion between Rāma and his brother, Bharata, on Rāma's return from his long exile.
- Bhavai*—A type of folk drama of Gujarat.
- Bheṭṭ-nāmā*—In Vṛindāban, a leasing arrangement whereby houses are given out for lifetime use on payment of a single sum that is adjusted to life expectancy.

- Bhīl*—A person belonging to an aboriginal tribal people living in the region of the Narmadā River.
- Bipin Bihārī*—‘Frolicker in the Forest,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Bihārī, Bihārī Lāl*—‘The Frolicsome,’ ‘The Frolicsome Lad,’ epithets of Kṛishṇa.
- Bīṛī*—A cheap type of leaf-wrapped cigarette.
- Bol*—A ‘drum call’ composed of a nonsense syllable or series of syllables, each of which prescribes a particular kind of stroke on a particular member of a pair of *tablās*. By uttering *bols*, a *kathak* requests from his drummer the rhythm pattern that is to govern the ensuing portion of his performance.
- Braj, Skt. Vraja*—The name applied in the *purāṇas* and in modern unofficial usage to the region of Mathurā. Rarely (archaistically), the name refers more narrowly to the outlying pasture lands in which the cowherds dwell, as distinct from the city of Mathurā.
- Brajbhāshā*—The Hindī dialect of Mathurā and adjacent districts. It was the dominant form of literary Hindī until the late nineteenth century.
- Braj Bihārī*—‘Frolicker in Braj,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Braj Dulāre*—‘Darling of Braj,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Braj Maṇḍal*—A territorial designation of the Braj country, specified as the land within the circuit (*maṇḍal*) of the pilgrimage path of the *banjātrā*.
- Braj parikramā*—The circumambulation of Braj that is carried out by the pilgrims who follow the *banjātrā*’s pilgrimage path to the scenes of all of Kṛishṇa’s famous childhood exploits.
- Brajraj*—‘The dust of Braj,’ prized by pilgrims because the feet of Kṛishṇa walked upon it, and credited with marvelous benefits for those on whose heads it may fall.
- Braj Sāhitya Maṇḍal*—The Braj Literature Society, a voluntary association of Mathurā which for a time published the journal, *Brajbhāratī*.
- Brajyātrā Līlā*—See p. 173, *Līlā* No. 64.
- Bulāk*—A nose pendant, usually of pearl.
- Caitra*—In the Hindu calendar, a month of the spring season, falling in March and April. It is preceded by Phālgun and followed by Vaiśākh.
- Caṇḍramā*—‘The Moon,’ a manual sign used by *kathaks*, referring to the moon.
- Caṇḍrāvalī Līlā*—See p. 168, *Līlā* No. 24.
- Caṇḍrikā*—A woman’s head ornament, worn on a band on the forehead.
- Cañvar*—A fly-whisk made of the tail of a yak.
- Caube*—A subcaste of brahmans which is numerous in Mathurā.
- Caupāī*—In Hindī prosody, a stanza of four lines, each line being sixteen short-vowel measures in length.
- Celā*—A disciple of a *guru*.
- Chāp*—‘Stamp,’ the name or appellation of a poet, usually incorporated in the last line of a verse or composition as an attestation of authorship.



*Chāk Līlā*—See p. 168, *Līlā* No. 25.

*Cihn*—‘Sign, token,’ the name preferred by Nand Kiśor Kathak for the manual symbols he used in the mimetic performance of his songs. Cf. *Hastaka*, *Mudrā*.

*Cīrharāṇ Līlā*—See p. 169, *Līlā* No. 27.

*Citra*—‘Picture;’ in ancient India, a brief topical or anecdotal dance sketch, an elemental unit of representational dance.

*Cogā*—A long coat of a style once worn at Muslim courts. Loose and buttonless, it is held together by a sash.

*Coṭī*—The Hindu queue, a lock of hair always left unshorn at the crown of the head.

*Cūrīdār pāyjamā*—A formal nether garment for men: a pair of light pantaloons with a drawstring at the waist, ample about the hips but tight about the calves and gathered in many horizontal ringlike folds above each ankle.

*Daṇḍaka*—A particular type of verse employed by the chief singer in *kathakālī* dramas. *Daṇḍakas*, which are in a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam, are said to be used along with Sanskrit *ślokas* to introduce actors and to provide explanations and narrative bridges.

*Daṇḍe kā rās*—In the modern *rāslīlā*, an optional dance sometimes included in the performance of the *rās*. See *Laguḍarāsa*.

*Dān Līlā*—See p. 170, *Līlā* No. 38.

*Darśan*—The direct visual contemplation, as an act of privileged worship, of a deity seen in an image, in a human embodiment, or in a vision.

*Daśahrā*—(1) A Hindu festival held, in northern India, on the tenth of the light fortnight of the month of Āśvin (September-October), in honor of the victories of Durgā or of Rāma; (2) the entire holiday season that centers on this day.

*Deva*—A general designation for any god of the Hindu pantheon.

*Devadāsī*—A dancing-girl attached to a Hindu temple.

*Devanāgarī*—The Indian alphabet in which the Hindī, Marāṭhī and Sanskrit languages are usually written.

*Devī*—‘The Goddess,’ an epithet particularly of Durgā.

*Ḍhāṇḍhī*, *ḍhāṇḍhin*—Musicians (male and female) of a low caste whose occupation is to attend at homes where children have just been born, and sing congratulatory songs. Called also *ḍhārḥī* and *ḍhārḥin*.

*Dharmśālā*—A lodging house built by a charitable donor for the free accommodation of pilgrims, usually at a *tīrth*.

*Dhenukāsūr Uddhār Līlā*—See p. 171, *Līlā* No. 41.

*Dhotī*—The common nether garment of Hindu men of North India: a long strip of cloth wound about the waist and between the legs.

*Dohā*—A kind of Hindī stanza in which the first and third lines are thirteen short-vowel measures in length, and the second and fourth are of eleven measures.

*Dupatṭā*—A mantilla or broad scarf worn over the shoulders by women.

*Dvāpar Age*—In Hindu cosmology, the third age (*yuga*) of the world, in which men fell into many disagreeing paths and righteousness diminished by half.

*Dvij*—‘Twice-born’: (1) a brahman; (2) a man of any of the three upper castes, whose male members are all entitled to initiation into the study of the Vedas.

*Gaccha*—A name applied to many of the sects into which the main divisions of the Jains are subdivided.

*Gaddī*—‘Cushion’: (1) the throne or seat of the founder of a sect; (2) the position of leadership held by the successor of the founder, as possessor of the see.

*Gandharva*—A class of semidivine musicians who are believed to sing and play at the banquets of the gods. The *apsarases* are their wives or mistresses.

*Gāṇḍīv*—The special name of Arjuna’s personal bow.

*Gaṇikā*—A courtesan.

*Garuḍa*—A mythical bird, of solar characteristics, which serves Viṣṇu as his special steed.

*Gat*—In a *kathak*’s performance, a narrative song which the *kathak* illustrates with special hand symbols called *cihn*.

*Gaurīputraka*—See *Maṅkha*.

*Gaurīyā Sampradāya*—A Vaiṣṇava sect founded in the sixteenth century by Caitanya and his disciples. It survives as the most powerful Vaiṣṇava movement of Bengal.

*Gavaiyā*—A singer.

*Gāyaka, gāyana, gāyanaka*—A singer.

*Ghaṁśyām*—‘The Cloud-dark One,’ an epithet of Kṛiṣṇa.

*Ghuṅgharū*—Small spherical bells, worn by dancers in bands about the ankles.

*Ghuṅghcī, Skt. guṅjā*—A bush (*Abrus precatorius*) that bears a small red seed with a black dot. The seeds are used as weights and as children’s beads.

*Gocāraṇ Līlā*—See p. 167, *Līlā* No. 17.

*Golokdhām*—The particular celestial abode of Kṛiṣṇa. It is also the heaven into which he takes his devotees when they depart from this world.

*Gopī*—One of the girls of the cowherd caste, who, according to the Vaiṣṇava *purāṇas*, were Kṛiṣṇa’s childhood playmates.

*Gopīprārthanā*—‘The Gopīs’ Supplication,’ in the progression of a *rāslīlā* performance, the third element, in which the *gopīs* implore Kṛiṣṇa to dance the *rās* with them.

*Gosāiṇ, Skt. gosvāmī*—A title borne by descendants of the founders of the Vaiṣṇava sects of North India.

*Govardhan Līlā*—See p. 168, *Līlā* No. 21.

*Granth Sāhab*—The principal canonical scripture of the Sikhs, the compilation of which was finished in A.D. 1604.

*Granthika*—A class of performers, mentioned in Patañjali's *Mahābhāshya*, who recited Vaishṇava legends in public. The present book argues that they recited texts to be mimed by dancers.

*Guṛiyā Līlā*—See p. 167, *Līlā* No. 15.

*Guru*—A spiritual preceptor who initiates disciples into the symbols and fundamental teachings of a sect or religious tradition.

*Hari, Harī*—An epithet of Viṣṇu, and hence of Kṛishṇa.

*Harijan*—A modern general designation for an outcaste.

*Hastaka*—A name sometimes applied to the hand positions used in mimic dance (*nāṭya*). Cf. *Cihn, Mudrā*.

*Hiṇḍolā*—Songs of a type that is traditional for singing during the light fortnight of the month of Śrāvaṇ, when images of Kṛishṇa are placed on swings (*hiṇḍol*).

*Hlāḍinī Śakti*—‘Blissful Energy,’ in the teaching of several of the Braj sects, an active aspect of the cosmic being of Kṛishṇa, with which Rādhā is identified.

*Holī*—A major Hindu holiday celebrated on the last day of the bright fortnight of the month of Phālgun (February-March).

*Iṣṭadevatā*—A god selected by a Hindu individual or family as a favorite for habitual worship, without denying the existence and significance of other deities.

*Janma Līlā*—See p. 169, *Līlā* No. 29.

*Janmāshṭamī*—The festival of the birth of Kṛishṇa, on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Bhāḍoṇ.

*Jhāñjh*—A brass percussion instrument used in pairs; small cymbals.

*Jhāñkī*—A North Indian type of religious spectacle. See Chapter One.

*Jīva*—The individual soul (real or apparent), as distinguished from the *Ātman* (Universal Soul) or from *Brahman* (the Absolute).

*Kadam, Skt. kadamba*—A variety of tree.

*Kailāś*—A mountain peak situated north of Lake Mānasa in Tibet. It is believed to be the special abode of Śiva.

*Kali Age*—In Hindu cosmology, the fourth and worst age (*yuga*) of the world, which is now current. It will end in a universal dissolution.

*Kālīnāg, Kāliyadaman Līlā*—See p. 166, *Līlā* No. 10.

*Kālindī*—A name of the River Jamunā.

*Kalpa*—In Hindu cosmology, a Day of Brahmā, the time between an emanation and a dissolution of the world, equal to 4,320,000,000 years.

*Kāmdev Madmardan Līlā*—See p. 166, *Līlā* No. 9.

*Kānh, Kanhaiyā, Kanuān*—‘Handsome Boy,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.

*Kānhrā*—A particular *rāga* or musical mode.

*Kaṇṣbadh*, *Skt. Kaṁsavadha*—‘The Slaying of Kaṁsa,’ a major exploit of Kṛishṇa.

*Kaṇṣbadh Līlā*—See p. 166, *Līlā* No. 8.

*Kaṇṭhā*—A necklace of large beads.

*Karā*—A metal ring worn on the arm or ankle as an ornament.

*Karīl*—A thorny leafless wasteland shrub, *Copparis aphylla*.

*Karma*—An act, and a retributive moral force which is always generated when the act is performed. Hindus believe that this force, held in reserve, will ultimately bring back upon the doer of the deed the appropriate reward or punishment.

*Kartāl*—A small wooden percussion instrument, two of which are used in each hand, with the effect of castanets. Metal discs set in slots in the *kartāl*’s wooden frame give the jingling sound of the tambourine also.

*Karūlā*—A bracelet.

*Kaṭakāchanī*—A long silk skirt, characteristic of Kṛishṇa, having wide horizontal bands of varied colors.

*Kathā*—A story, often on an edifying moral or religious theme, that is read or retold from an epic or *purāṇa*.

*Kathak*—A practitioner of a regional dance tradition of North India. See Chapter Two.

*Kathakalī*—A type of dance drama of Kerala.

*Kathāvācak*—A modern North Indian name for a reader and elaborator of *kathās*. In other times or regions such a performer has been called a *paurāṇika* or *kathaka*.

*Kaṭrā*—A small market enclosed within the walls of a rectangular court.

*Kharī bolī*—The form of Hindī that is now established as standard, and the national language of India.

*Khyāl*—A style of ballad which, at least in Mārṇā in the nineteenth century, was performed as a rudimentary drama.

*Kirīṭ*—A diadem; any head ornament used as a crown.

*Kīrttan*—A type of highly rhythmic emotional hymn, sung by a leader with a congregation as chorus. The names of a deity are repeated, his praise is sung, or his deeds are narrated.

*Kīrttanīyā*—(1) A type of performer of Kṛishṇa’s deeds, known in the sixteenth century, who was a predecessor of the modern *rāsdhārī*; (2) a certain type of actor of modern Bihar, belonging to a quite different tradition; (3) in Bengal, any singer of *kīrttans*.

*Koṭī*—(1) A crore (ten million); (2) a limitless number.

*Kṛīśāśvin*—A class of ancient Indian dancers and actors belonging to the school of Kṛīśāśva.



- Kṛishṇalīlā*—‘Kṛishṇa’s Sport,’ any literary or dramatic presentation of the acts of Kṛishṇa.
- Kṛishṇanāṭṭam*—A dance drama of Kerala in which legends of Kṛishṇa are enacted.
- Kṛishṇasvarūp*—An actor who impersonates Kṛishṇa and is believed to incarnate him while he wears that deity’s crown.
- Kshepak*—A literary interpolation or addendum.
- Kshīrsāgār Līlā*—See p. 167, *Līlā* No. 13.
- Kumbh Melā*—A major Hindu religious fair of the winter season. It is held at various *tīrths* in a rotation that is completed once in twelve years.
- Kuṇḍal*—A circlet worn in the lobe of the ear.
- Laguḍarāsa, lakuṭarāsa*—An old group dance in which the performers, holding a stick in each hand, form a circle and rotate in various ways while striking each other’s sticks in keeping with the time.
- Laṭita*—A type of folk drama of Mahārāshṭra.
- Laṅkā*—In the Rāmāyaṇa, the country of the demon Rāvaṇa, usually identified with Ceylon.
- Lārlīlāl*—‘Darling Girl and Boy,’ an epithet of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa jointly.
- Laṭ*—A lock or tuft of hair.
- Līlā*—‘Sport,’ a deed of a god, or a drama that re-enacts such a deed.
- Līlāpatra*—The published calendar of a *Rāmlīlā* festival, in which the schedule of public rituals, dramas, and pageants is given, with the hours of the performances.
- Lohāsurbadh Līlā*—See p. 176, *Līlā* No. 88.
- Mādhuryarasa*—The adoring mood of a lover toward the beloved, expressed in personal worship of a deity or in a literary or dramatic piece of devotional nature.
- Māghayātrā*—A public festival of Nepal, observed in the winter month of Māgha.
- Mahaṇṭ*—The head of a Hindu monastery, ascetic order, or other religious institution.
- Mahārās, Mahārās Līlā*—(1) In *purāṇic* legend, the final and fullest form of the *rāsa* dance that Kṛishṇa performed with the *gopīs*. After ending his estrangement from them, Kṛishṇa assumed as many forms as there were *gopīs*, so that each might dance with him as partner. (2) The dramatic re-enactment of this elaborated dance. See also *Rāspūrṇimā*.
- Mahotsava*—‘The Great Festival,’ in medieval Kṛishṇaism, the *Kṛishṇarāsa-mahotsava*, i.e. the celebration of the *Mahārāsa*, Kṛishṇa’s culminating dance with the *gopīs*.
- Mainā*—The myna, a bird of the starling family which can be domesticated and taught to speak.

- Maṇḍalī*—‘A circle, company,’ a troupe of actors.
- Mandirā*—One of a pair of small brass cymbals used in beating time.
- Maṅgalācaraṇ*—A song of praise offered at the beginning of a *rāslīlā* to Rādhā and Kṛishṇa enthroned amid the *gopīs* on the *raṅgmaṇc*, to invoke blessing on the coming performance. Any similar initial invocation of blessing.
- Maṅkha*—In ancient India, a wandering displayer of portable pictures; also called a *gaurīputraka*.
- Mān Līlā*—See p. 175, *Līlā* No. 76.
- Māñṭīkhāman Līlā*—See p. 176, *Līlā* No. 81.
- Mathurāgaman Līlā*—See p. 174, *Līlā* No. 70.
- Māyā*—In *advaita* teaching, a cosmic distorting factor which causes Absolute Reality, though one only, to be mistakenly perceived as a pluralistic world and as separate persons, human and divine.
- Mīr*—A Muslim title borne by noblemen and officials.
- Mohan*—‘The Fascinating,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Mridaṅ*—A large double-ended drum.
- Mormukūṭ*—‘Peacock Crown,’ the distinctive head-dress of Kṛishṇa in the costuming of the *rāslīlā*.
- Motīmālā*—A necklace of strung pearls.
- Mudrā*—Certain mimetic and symbolic positions of the fingers, limbs and head used in Indian classical dance, in *kathakālī*, and in some tantric forms of ritual worship of the gods. Cf. *Cihn*, *Hastaka*.
- Mukūṭ*—A crown, tiara.
- Mūrtti*—An image, idol; also said to be the name of an obscure type of semi-dramatic spectacle.
- Nāc*—Dance, in general; especially, the nautch, the debased popular dance of recent centuries in North India.
- Nācnī*—A dancing-girl who performs the *nāc*.
- Nāg*, *Skt. nāga*—(1) A serpent; (2) one of a class of mythical semi-divine beings having the hood, tail and habits of serpents.
- Nāgapañcamī*—A Hindu festival for the appeasement of serpents, which is held on the fifth day of the light fortnight of the month of Śrāvaṇ.
- Nandalāl*—‘Dear Son of Nanda,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Nandanandan*—‘Delighting to Nanda,’ i.e. Son of Nanda, an epithet of Kṛishṇa.
- Nāndī*—Verses recited at the beginning of a Sanskrit play by the *sūtradhāra*, to invoke blessing upon the performance.
- Naqqāl*—A Muslim buffoon or mimic.
- Nartaka*—A dancer, actor.
- Naṭ*—In modern India, a caste of wandering rope-dancers, jugglers, and acrobats.
- Naṭa*—In ancient India, a general name for actors and dancers.

- Nāṭak*—A 'play' in the Western sense—a drama characterized by spoken prose dialogue and formal scene divisions.
- Nāṭyarāsaka*—Among the medieval Jains and others, a one-act dance drama, the exact nature of which remains obscure.
- Nāṭyaśāstra*—The oldest and most authoritative extant treatise on Indian music, dance and drama. It is attributed to Bharata Muni. Most scholars estimate its date at about the second to fourth centuries A.D.
- Nauṭaṅkī*—A little-known type of popular operatic drama of North India in which the stories of legendary heroes are staged, with dance interludes.
- Nawāb*—A Muslim governor, regional ruler, or nobleman.
- Nikuñj lilās*—'Bower sports,' those *rāslilā* dramas in which the story and mood are amorous and the feminine center of attention is Rādhā rather than the *gopīs* in general.
- Nimbārka Sampradāya*—The oldest of the major Vaishṇava sects of Braj, called also the Sanakādi Sampradāya. It was founded by the medieval teacher Nimbārka.
- Nirājana*—A medieval ceremony similar to the current *āratī*, performed in opening a drama.
- Nirguṇa*—'Devoid of properties'; the doctrine that the Supreme Being is immaterial, or beyond characterization.
- Nirtakālī*—A folk drama dealing with the mythology of Śiva, which has been reported as existing in Purnea District of Bihār.
- Nṛītak*—A general term for a dancer.
- Nṛītya*—Dance; particularly, non-mimetic dance, which expresses mood by rhythm and patterned movement only.
- Nūpur*—An anklet; a dancer's ankle bells (*ghuṅgarū*).
- Oṛhnī*—A woman's head scarf.
- Pada*—The unit of rhythmic prose in which the dialogues of *kathakālī* dramas are said to be conducted.
- Pāda*—(1) One of the four half-lines of which a *śloka* is composed; (2) one of the four lines into which any verse can be divided that falls metrically into quarters.
- Pāg*—A turban.
- Pājeb*—A jingling ankle ornament of metal links, worn by women.
- Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās*—A class of old Vaishṇava manuals which describe the requirements of religious architecture, image worship, meditation and belief.
- Paṇḍā*—A brahman who guides pilgrims in visiting a *tīrth* and in performing the local rituals that are prescribed for visitors.
- Paṇḍit*—A title that recognizes a man as learned: (1) In the *Rāmlīlā*, the stage-side reciter of the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; (2) in broad usage, any brahman who follows a traditional brahmanical profession.

*Panghaṭ Līlā*—See p. 172, *Līlā* No. 51.

*Parameśvara*—‘Supreme Lord’; among Indian monotheists, a favorite name for God.

*Pārāyaṇa*—The reading of the whole of a sacred book in a series of measured readings that are so proportioned as to ensure complete coverage in a pre-determined number of days.

*Paṭakā*, *Skt. paṭṭaka*—A sash worn about the waist.

*Pātāla*—The infernal regions of the world, seven in number, which are the abode of *nāgas* and *rākshasas*; or the seventh and lowest of these subterranean realms.

*Pāṭhśālā*—An indigenous type of Indian lower school.

*Paurāṇika*—In ancient and modern India, a professional reader and explainer of the *purāṇas*. See also *Kathāvācak*.

*Phālgun*—In the Hindu calendar, a month of early spring, coming after Māgh and before Caitra, in February and March.

*Phugaḍī*—A circular folk dance of Mahārāshṭra.

*Pīṛhī*—An individual’s genealogy, pedigree, or chronological list of predecessors in a line of teaching or artistic activity.

*Pītāmbar*—A yellow silk *dhotī* worn by the god Kṛishṇa and his impersonators, and by Hindu men when engaged in certain rituals.

*Prakaṭ līlās*—‘Manifest sports,’ those deeds of Kṛishṇa that were mundane in setting and are therefore known to men as stories and are open to dramatic imitation.

*Prasād*—Food offered to an idol and often made available thereafter, as a special favor, to those who are present at the idol’s shrine.

*Pravacan*—‘Elucidation, homily’; in a *rāslīlā* performance, an edifying address sometimes delivered by the impersonator of Kṛishṇa during an interlude between the conclusion of the *rās* and the beginning of the *līlā*.

*Pūjā*—The type of Hindu ritual employed in the worship of images.

*Pushṭimārgiyā*—Pertaining to the *Pushṭimārga* (i.e. to the philosophical and practical teaching of Vallabhācārya) or to the sect which promotes it, the Vallabha Sampradāya.

*Pūtanābadh Līlā*, *Pūtanā Uddhār Līlā*—See p. 172, *Līlā* No. 53.

*Putrakāmeshṭī*—A vedic sacrifice performed by those who wished to beget a son.

*Rādhā*, *Rādhikā*—Kṛishṇa’s special sweetheart, the daughter of Vṛishabhānu.

*Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya*—One of the four Vaishṇava sects of modern Braj, founded by Hit Harivaṃś in the sixteenth century. It is set apart by worship that is directed primarily to Rādhā, and by the use of highly erotic poetry.

*Rāga*—In Indian music, a particular group of tones which, in many variations of arrangement, constitute a traditional melodic type or mode.



- Rāginī*—A modification of a *rāga*, conceived as its wife.
- Rājgaddī*—A royal throne (see *Gaddī*); an enthronement, a coronation.
- Rahīm*—‘The Compassionate’ (Arabic), used by Muslims as one of the most prominent of the names of Allah.
- Rākshasa*—One of a class of evil superhuman beings who afflict mankind in particular; a demon, a goblin.
- Ramānāth*—‘Husband of Ramā,’ i.e. Husband of Lakshmī, an epithet of Viṣṇu and hence of Kṛiṣṇa.
- Rāmanāṭṭam*—A dance drama of Kerala in which themes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are enacted.
- Rāmāyaṇa*—Title of the Sanskrit epic poem on the career of Rāmacandra, written by Vālmīki about 400 B.C., or a general name for any work which retells this story in a vernacular language.
- Rāmcaritmānas*—‘The Sacred Lake of the Deeds of Rāma,’ the title of a Hindī *Rāmāyaṇa* written by Tulsīdās between A.D. 1574 and 1584.
- Rāmlīlā*—A North Indian dramatic festival in which the *Rāmcaritmānas* is recited and enacted. See Chapter Four.
- Rāmrāj, Rāmrājya*—‘The Rule of Rāma,’ a traditional metaphor describing a benign and happy régime.
- Raṅga*—A theater, stage, arena, place for public performances.
- Raṅgmaṇḍ*—In the context of the dramas described in this book, a long bench-like dais placed upon the stage at one of its borders. On it a throne is erected for the seating of the impersonators of the principal deities of the play. It is used in throneroom scenes and in the opening and closing rituals of the performance.
- Rās*—(1) Kṛiṣṇa’s circular dance with the *gopīs*, described in the *Vaiṣṇava purāṇas*; (2) the re-enactment of that dance in the introductory portion of a *rāslīlā* performance; (3) sometimes used in abbreviated reference to the entire drama.
- Rāsaka*—An obscure form of medieval dramatic literature that was cultivated by the Jains and others.
- Rāsapañcādhyāyī*—‘The Five Chapters on the Rāsa,’ the name of a much-loved piece of Sanskrit literature found in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, X.29–33.
- Rāsapañcādhyāyī Līlā*—See p. 175, *Līlā* No. 75.
- Rāsdhārī*—A member of a professional troupe for performing the *rāslīlā*; particularly, the leader of such a troupe.
- Rasik jan*—‘People of taste,’ i.e. people of emotional and aesthetic sensitivity, who are connoisseurs of the feelings and appreciations cultivated in *bhakti* religion.
- Rāslīlā*—(1) A hieratic drama of Braj in which Kṛiṣṇa’s *rāsa* dance with the *gopīs* is re-enacted first, and then some other deed of Kṛiṣṇa is dramatized

in operatic style (see Part II); (2) the original dance of Kṛishṇa with the *gopīs*.

*Rāslīlānukaraṇ*—‘Imitation of the *rāslīlā*,’ the full and specific name of the *rāslīlā* as a human dramatic tradition, distinguishing it from the original acts done by Kṛishṇa himself.

*Rāsmāṇḍal*—‘The Rās Circle’: (1) The circle formed by Kṛishṇa and the *gopīs*, or by actors who imitate them, in dancing the *rās*; (2) the circular area in which the *rās* was or is danced; (3) a round masonry platform, built to accommodate dramatic performances of the *rāslīlā*.

*Rāsmāṇḍalī*—A complete troupe of professional actors and musicians who perform the *rāslīlā*.

*Rāspūrṇimā*—The annual festival, on the full-moon night of the autumn month of Kārttik, which commemorates Kṛishṇa’s dancing of the *rāsa* dance with the *gopīs*. The *Mahārās Līlā* is enacted then by the *rāsdhārīs*.

*Rātra*—‘A night,’ a name sometimes applied to a major division of a book.

*Rāvaṇvadh*—‘The Slaying of Rāvaṇa,’ the great outdoor pageant, at the climax of the *Rāmlīlā* performances, that memorializes Rāma’s final victory over the demon who had abducted his wife.

*Sabhā*—An association, society, assembly.

*Sādhu*—‘Holy man,’ any Hindu religious mendicant who has left home and family and assumed the dress of an ascetic.

*Śailālaka*, *Śailālin*—In ancient India, a major category of actors, identified by their adherence to the school of Śilālin.

*Sakhī*—In the mythology of the Kṛishṇa cult of Braj, an inner circle of *gopīs* who are Rādhā’s female attendants and intimate friends.

*Śakta*—A worshiper of the *śakti* or female energy of Śiva, particularly in the form of Durgā or one of her manifestations such as Kālī; used adjectively, pertaining to the thought and practice of such worshipers.

*Śakti*—(1) The active energy of a deity conceived as female; mythologically speaking, the deity’s wife; (2) a magic weapon used by Meghnād in his fight against Lakshmaṇa.

*Śālagrām*—A round black fossilized ammonite with markings reminiscent of the discus symbol of Viṣṇu. It is regarded as an acceptable abode for Viṣṇu, and as the equivalent of a Viṣṇu image for purposes of worship.

*Salām*—‘Peace!’ An Arabic salutation commonly used by Muslims.

*Sāligrām* (Brajbhāshā)—See *Śālagrām*.

*Samādhi*—The grave or tomb of a *sannyāsī*, so named on the presumption that a holy man enters there into his final beatific state of mental concentration (*samādhi*).

*Samdhi*—In Sanskrit grammar, the euphonic accommodation to each other, according to elaborate rules, of the final and initial letters of syllables that

fall into conjunction with each other when words and sentences are composed.

*Samgīta*—A type of operatic dance drama of medieval India.

*Samgītācārya*—Music master.

*Samgīt samāj*—The band of instrumentalists and vocalists which provides the choral and instrumental accompaniment in the performance of a *rāslīlā*.

*Samjīvanī*—A mythical herb believed to restore the dead to life. To revive stricken Lakshmaṇa, Hanumān brought the herb to the battlefield by carrying from the Himalayas the entire mountain on which it grew.

*Sampradāya*—A religious sect, or its traditional doctrine.

*Samvat*—‘Year,’ a term that introduces a date of the Vikrama Era. To obtain an approximate Western date, subtract the number fifty-seven.

*Sāñjhī Līlā*—See p. 178, *Līlā* No. 101.

*Śaṅkar Līlā*—See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 96.

*Śaṇnyāsī*—A Hindu religious mendicant. More particularly, a mendicant whose dignity is superior because he is learned, or because he has fulfilled the brahmanical ideal by completing the term of the householder’s life and becoming an ascetic in his later years.

*Śaṇtanu Līlā*—See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 95.

*Sārāṅgī*—A viol-like musical instrument having a double bank of strings, the upper of which is played with a bow. The lower is activated only by resonance.

*Sārī*—The main garment of most Indian women. It consists of a single long piece of cloth wound about the body to form, first, a skirt, and then a cover for shoulders and head.

*Satī*—A Hindu wife who cremates herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.

*Śaubbhika, śobhanika*—A class of ancient Indian reciters and dramatic dancers.

*Seṭh*—A title given in modern India to a wealthy merchant or moneylender.

*Siṅhāsan*—A throne; in these plays, a throne mounted upon the dais (*raṅg-maṇḍ*) for the seating of the impersonators of deities or kings.

*Śiv Jogī Līlā*—See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 96.

*Śloka, ślok*—A type of Sanskrit verse, common in epic literature, which consists generally of four half-lines, each of the length of eight short vowels; in Hindī, a loose designation for many kinds of verses.

*Soraṭhā*—A type of Hindī verse in which the first and third lines are eleven short-vowel measures in length, and the second and fourth lines are two measures longer.

*Śrāddha*—A class of Hindu post-funerary rituals, some of which require that many brahmans be invited and feasted.

*Śrāvaṇ*—In the Hindu calendar, a rainy-season month falling in July and August.



*Śṛiṅgārī*—A costumer and make-up man.

*Sthāpaka*—According to the scholastic theorists of the classical Indian stage, a kind of stage director who served as an assistant to the *sūtradhāra*.

*Sudāmā Līlā*—See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 97.

*Śūdra*—A man of the lowest of the four *varṇas* or major caste divisions, for whom the ancient Hindu law prescribes servile occupations.

*Śukla*—‘White, bright,’ a term used in Hindu dates to identify the days of the fortnight of the waxing moon, as distinct from the dark (*kṛishṇa*) fortnight, in which the moon is waning.

*Sūta*—In ancient India, a court panegyrist who rode in the royal chariot and recited the heroic deeds of the king and the king’s ancestors.

*Sutta*—A Buddhist scripture belonging to the Sutta Piṭaka. The *suttas* are the principal depository of the teaching of Theravāda Buddhism.

*Sūtradhāra*—A stage superintendent and master of ceremonies in certain types of ancient Indian dramas.

*Svāmī*—‘Master’; in the context of these dramas, the proprietor of a troupe.

*Svāṅg*—A variety of folk drama current in the Punjāb.

*Svarūp*—A child actor who impersonates a deity and is regarded as a temporary residence of the god, from the moment of the placing on his head of the deity’s crown.

*Svayaṃvar*—The occasion at which a girl of noble family in ancient India chose her husband at a public assembly of suitors.

*Śyām, Syām*—‘The Dark,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.

*Śyāmā*—‘Consort of Śyām,’ an epithet of Rādhā.

*Śyāmsagāī Līlā*—See p. 178, *Līlā* No. 98.

*Śyāmsundar*—‘The Dark and Handsome,’ an epithet of Kṛishṇa.

*Tablā*—A type of small single-ended drum, used in pairs of special design for the right and left hands, and beaten with the palms and fingers.

*Takht*—A movable wooden platform, commonly used as a bed or divan.

*Tālārāsaka*—An obscure type of medieval folk dance.

*Tantra*—A systematic treatise of advanced Śāktism, which maximizes the place of the divine female energy in cosmology and ritual.

*Tāṇtrik*—A person who is versed in the teaching of the tantras; used adjectively, pertaining to the outlook or practices taught in the tantras.

*Tāśāvālā*—A kind of drummer who marches in processions carrying a drum on a bandoleer and beating it with two sticks.

*Tej*—In costuming, a circle of rays represented in metal and affixed to the rear of a *svarūp*’s crown, like the *prabhāmaṇḍala* of images.

*Tailāṅga*—Belonging to Telinga, i.e. Andhra, the Telugu-speaking country.

*Tilak*—An ornamental mark of colored paste, worn on the forehead. The design and color often indicate the sect to which the wearer belongs.



*Ṭiprī*—A folk dance of Mahārāshṭra. It is performed by a circle of dancers bearing sticks (*ṭiprī*) in each hand.

*Tīrth*—A holy spot to which Hindus customarily make pilgrimages.

*Tīrth Darśan Līlā*—See p. 170, *Līlā* No. 36.

*Tretā Age*—In Hindu cosmology, the second or 'silver' age of the world, in which the primal righteousness of the first age devolved into ritualism and men began to seek rewards for pious acts.

*Tulsī*—The basil bush, which is regarded as sacred by Vaishṇavas.

*Turrā*—A plume, tassel, or rosette worn as a cockade on a headdress.

*Uddhav Līlā*—See p. 166, *Līlā* No. 7, and Chapter Nine entire.

*Ukhalbandhan Līlā*—See p. 166, *Līlā* No. 6.

*Updeś*—Moral or spiritual instruction, a sermon; the homiletical dialogue that is often included in a *jhāṅkī* performance.

*Ustād*—'Preceptor, instructor, master,' a title of Persian origin, applied by some *kathaks* to their instructors in the dance.

*Vādaka*—Instrumentalist, musician.

*Vāgjīvana*—A professional speaker.

*Vaidya Līlā*—See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 92.

*Vairāgī*—Preferred designation of Vaishṇava ascetics, cf. *saṇnyāsī*.

*Vaishṇav*—'Vishṇu-worshiper,' a title applied in Braj to all *sādhus* who participate in the local Kṛishṇa cult.

*Vallabha Sampradāya*—A prominent Vaishṇava sect of Braj which has much following in Western India also. It was founded in the sixteenth century by Vallabhācārya and his son, Viṭṭhalnāth. Its teaching is called the *Pushṭi-mārga*.

*Vanamālīn* (Sanskrit)—See *Banmālī*.

*Vanayātrā* (Sanskrit)—See *Banjātrā*.

*Varuṇa Līlā*, *Varuṇālay Līlā*—See p. 189, *Līlā* No. 89.

*Vātsalya rasa*—In the worship of a deity, a mood like that of a parent who delights in and adores a child.

*Vidyādhari*—A female of a class of mythical fairies of benign disposition and magical powers who are thought to dwell in the Himalayas.

*Vidūshaka*—A buffoon (a stock character in Indian dramas) who is the companion of the hero of the play.

*Vijayādaśamī*—'Triumphant Tenth,' the tenth day of the light fortnight of the month of Āśvin (September-October), on which the victory of Rāma or of Durgā is celebrated.

*Vīṇā*—A famous seven-stringed instrument of the guitar type that has a gourd resonator at each end of the finger board.

*Vīra rasa*—In Sanskrit dramaturgy, the heroic mood as a distinguishing characteristic in the classification of plays.

## GLOSSARY

*Vyās*—A professional brahman reciter of the Hindu epics ; a Rāmāyaṇa specialist who directs and prompts Rāmlīlā dramas.

*Vivāha Līlā*—See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 91.

*Vyomāsurbadh Līlā*— See p. 177, *Līlā* No. 93.

*Vraja* (Sanskrit)—See *Braj*.

*Yātrā*—A journey to a tirth; a group of traveling pilgrims; a procession of persons escorting idols; a religious fair; an operatic folk drama of Bengal.

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